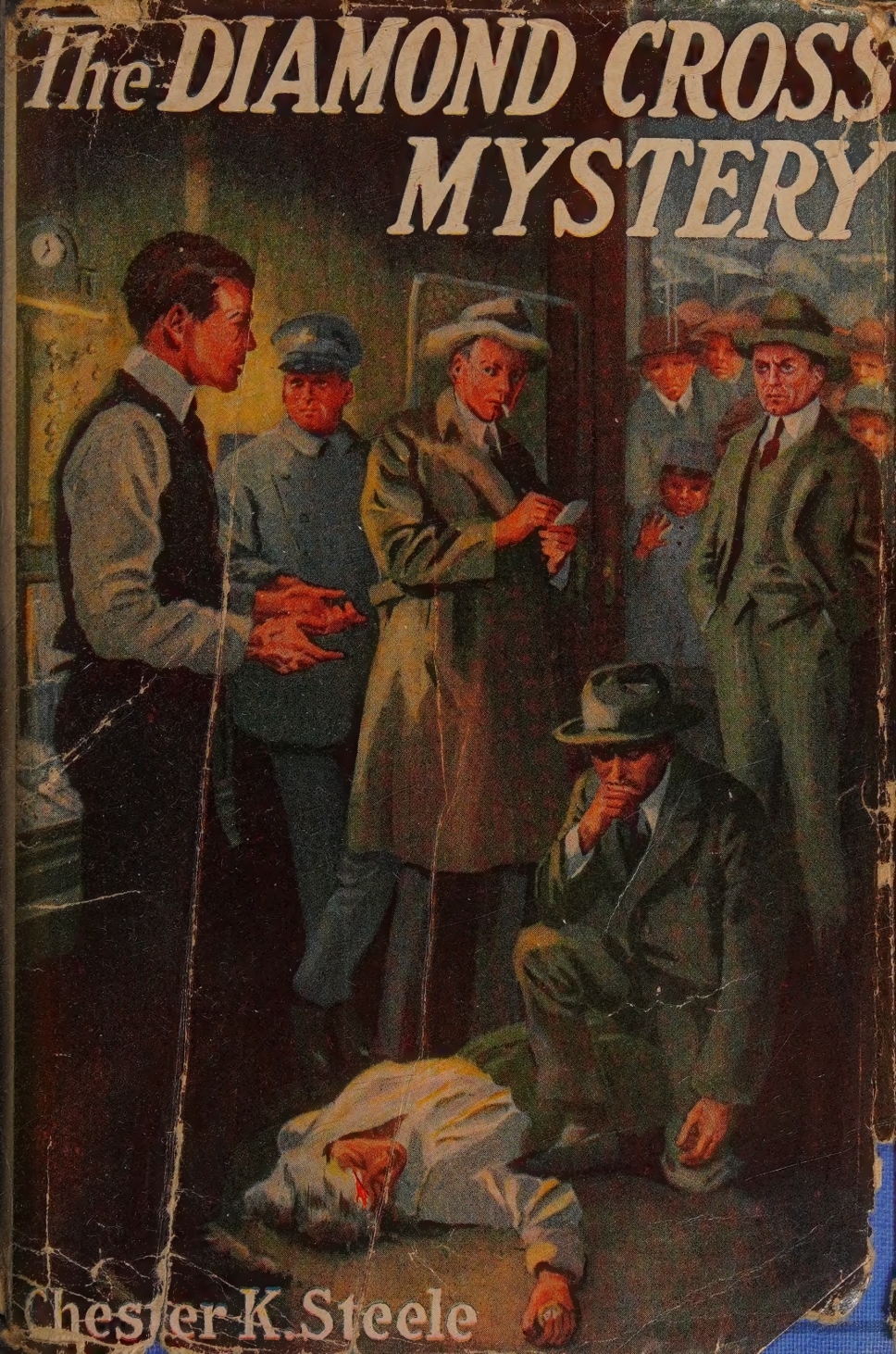
The DIAMOND CROSS MYSTERY



Chester K. Steele

THE DIAMOND CROSS MYSTERY

by

CHESTER K. STEELE

Author of

"The Mansion of Mystery"

Here is something positively new in the line of mystery stories. "Colonel Ashley," a military man turned detective, is a character that once known is never to be forgotten. The plot hinges on a murder and the mysterious disappearance of a cross of diamonds, and suspicion points to the lover of one of the sweetest girls ever introduced in fiction. And then—and this is unusual in a detective story—there is some real humor, the trail of "Spotty," who was willing to confess to anything.

INTERNATIONAL FICTION
LIBRARY
CLEVELAND NEW YORK

COMPLIMENTS
OF
THE READERS BUREAU OF
THE HALIFAX HERALD
AND
THE EVENING MAIL

OWNERS NAME.....

DATE.....

THE DIAMOND CROSS MYSTERY

Being a Somewhat Different Detective Story

By
CHESTER K. STEELE
Author of "The Mansion of Mystery," etc.

INTERNATIONAL FICTION LIBRARY
CLEVELAND NEW YORK
Made in U. S. A.

Copyright, 1918, by
GEORGE SULLY & COMPANY

All Rights Reserved

PRESS OF
THE COMMERCIAL BOOKBINDING CO.
CLEVELAND

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Ticking Watch	1
II.	King's Dagger	18
III.	The Fisherman	40
IV.	Spotty	57
V.	Amy's Appeal	80
VI.	Grafton's Search	97
VII.	The Colonel is Surprised	113
VIII.	The Diamond Cross	124
IX.	Indicted	135
X.	The Death Watch	143
XI.	No Alimony	152
XII.	The Odd Coin	165
XIII.	Singa Phut	181
XIV.	The Hidden Wires	191
XV.	A Dog	204
XVI.	The Colonel Wonders	216
XVII.	"A Jolly Good Fellow"	225
XVIII.	Amy's Test	237
XIX.	Word From Spotty	246
XX.	In The Shadows	258
XXI.	Swirling Waters	269
XXII.	His Last Case	285

THE DIAMOND CROSS MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

THE TICKING WATCH

THERE was only one sound which broke the intense stillness of the jewelry shop on that fateful April morning. That sound was the ticking of the watch in the hand of the dead woman.

Outside, the rain was falling. Not a heavy downpour which splashed cheerfully on umbrellas and formed swollen streams in the gutters, whence they rushed toward the sewer basins, carrying with them an accumulation of sticks, leaves and dirt. Not a windy, gusty rain, that made a man glad to get indoors near a genial fire, with his pipe and a book.

It was a drizzle; a steady, persistent drizzle, which a half-hearted wind blew this way and that, as though neither element cared much for the task in hand—that of thoroughly soaking the particular part of the universe in the neighborhood of Colchester and taking its own time in which to do it.

Early in the unequal contest the sun had given up its effort to pierce through the leaden clouds, and had taken its beams to other places—to busy cities, to smiling country villages and farms. Above, around, below, on all sides, soaking through and through, drizzling it, soaking it, sprinkling it, half-hiding it in fog and mist, the rain enveloped Colchester—a sodden, damp garment.

Early paper boys slunk along the slippery streets, trying to protect their limp wares from becoming mere blotters. The gongs of the few trolley cars that were sent out to take the early toilers to their tasks rang as though covered with a blanket of fog. The thud of the feet of the milkmen's horses was muffled, and the rattle of bottles seemed to come from afar off, as though over some misty lake.

James Darcy, shivering as he arose, silently protesting, from his warm bed, pulled on his garments audibly grumbling, the grumble becoming a voiced protest as he shuffled in his slippers along the corridor above the jewelry shop and went down the private stairs into the main salesroom.

The electric light in front of the massive safe seemed to lear at him with a bleared eye like that of a toper, who, having spent the night in convivial company, found himself, most unac-

countably, on his own doorstep in the gray dawn.

"Raining!" murmured James Darcy, as he reached over to switch on the light above the little table where he set precious stones into gold and platinum of rare and beautiful designs. "Raining and cold! I wish the steam was on."

The fog from outside seemed to have penetrated into the jewelry shop. It swirled about the gleaming showcases, reflected from the cut glass, danced away from the silver cups, broke into points of light from the times of forks, became broad splotches on the blades of knives, and, perchance, made its way through the cracks into the safe, where it bathed the diamonds, the rubies, the sapphires, the aqua marines, the pearls, the jades, and the bloodstones in a white mist. The bloodstones——

Strange that James Darcy should have thought of them as he looked at the rain outside, heard its drip, drip, drip on the windows, and saw the fog and swirls of mist inside and without the store. Strange and——

First, as he gazed at the prostrate body—the horrid red blotch like a gay ribbon in the white hair—he thought the small, insistent sound which seemed to fill the room was the beating of her heart. Then, as he listened, his ears attuned with fear, he knew it was the ticking of the watch in the hand of the dead woman.

James Darcy rubbed his eyes, as though to clear them from the fog. He rubbed them again—he passed his hand before his face as if cobwebs had drifted there—he touched his ears, which seemed not a part of himself.

"Tick-tick! Tick-tick! Tick-tick!"

The sound seemed to grow louder. It was not her heart!

"Hello! Come here, somebody! Amelia! what's the matter? Sallie! Sallie Page! Wake up! Hello, somebody! She's dead! Killed! There's been a murder! I must get the police!"

James Darcy started to cross the room to reach and fling open the front door leading to the street, that he might call the alarm to others than the deaf cook, who had not yet come downstairs. Mrs. Darcy's maid had gone away the previous evening, and was not expected in until noon. It was too early for any of the jewelry clerks to report. Yet Darcy felt he must have some one with him.

To cross the store to reach the door meant stepping over the body—the grotesquely twisted body, with the white, upturned face and the little spot of red, near where the silver comb had fallen from the silvered hair. And so Darcy changed his mind—he ran to the side door, fumbled with the lock, flung back the portal, and then rushed out in the rain and drizzle, the fog streaming after him as he parted the mist like

long, white streamers of ribbon, such as they suspend at the door for the very young or the aged.

"Hello! Hello!" shouted Darcy into the silent rain and mist of the early morning street, now deserted save for himself.

The glistening asphalt, the gleaming trolley rails, the dark and damp buildings seemed to echo back his words.

"Hello! Hello!"

"Police!" voiced James Darcy. "There's been a murder!"

"A murder!" echoed the mist.

There was silence after this, and Darcy looked up and down the street. Not a person—not a vehicle—was in sight. No one looked from the stores or houses on either side or across from the jewelry shop.

Then a rattling milk wagon swung around the corner. It was followed by another.

"Hello! Hello! there—you!" called Darcy hoarsely.

"What's the matter?" asked the first man, as he swung down from his vehicle with a wire carrier filled with bottles in his hand.

"Somebody's been hurt—killed—a relative of mine! I want to tell the police. It's in that jewelry store," and he pointed back toward it, for he had run down the street a little way.

"Oh, I see! Darcy's! She's killed you say?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Accident?"

"I don't know. Looks to me more like murder!"

The milkman whistled, set his collection of bottles back in his wagon, and hurried with Darcy toward the store. The other man, bringing his rattling vehicle to a stop, followed.

"Where is she?" whispered Casey, as soon as he reached the side of his business rival, Tremlain.

"On the floor—right in the middle—between the showcases," answered Darcy, and he, too, whispered. It seemed the right thing to do. "There—see her!"

He pointed a trembling finger.

"Lord! Her head's smashed!" exclaimed Casey. "Look at the blood!"

"I—I don't want to look at it," murmured Darcy, faintly.

"Hark!" cautioned Tremlain. What's that noise?"

They all listened—they all heard it.

"It's a watch ticking," answered Darcy. "First I thought it was her heart beating—it sounded so. But it's only a watch."

"Maybe so," assented Casey. "We'd better make sure before we telephone for the police.

She may only have fallen and cut her head."

"You—you go and see," suggested Tremlain. "I—I don't like to go near her—I never could bear the sight of dead folks—not even my own father. You look!"

Casey hesitated a moment, and then stepped closer to the body. He leaned over it and put the backs of his hard fingers on the white, wrinkled and shrunken cheeks. They were cold and wax-like to his touch.

"She's dead," he whispered softly. "Better get the police right away."

"Murdered?" asked Tremlain, who had remained beside Darcy near the showcase where the silver gleamed.

"I don't know. Her head's cut bad, though there's not so much blood as I thought at first. We mustn't touch the body—that's the law. Got to leave it until the coroner sees it. Where's the telephone?"

"Right back here," answered Darcy eagerly. "Police headquarters number is——"

"I know it," interrupted Casey. "I had to call 'em up once when I had a horse stole. I'll get 'em. What's that watch ticking?" he asked, pausing. "Oh, it's in her hand!" and the other two looked and saw, clasped close in the palm of the woman lying huddled on the floor, a watch of uncommon design. It was ticking loudly.

"What makes it sound so plain?" asked Tremlain.

"Cause it's so quiet in here," answered Casey. "It'll be noisy enough later on, though! But it's so quiet—that's what makes the ticking of the watch sound so plain."

"It *is* quiet," observed Tremlain. "But in a jewelry store there's always a lot of clocks making a noise and—Say!" he suddenly cried, "there's not a clock in this place ticking—notice that? Not a clock ticking! They've all stopped!"

"You're right!" exclaimed Casey. "The watch is the only thing going in the whole place!"

The milkmen looked quickly at Darcy.

"Yes, the clocks have all stopped," he said, wetting his lips with his tongue. "I didn't notice it before, though I did hear the watch in her hand ticking—I thought it was her heart beating —I guess I said that before—I don't know what I am saying. This has upset me frightfully."

"I should think it would," agreed Casey. "Funny thing about the clocks all stopping, though. S'pose they all ran down at once?"

"They couldn't," Darcy answered. "I wound the regulator only yesterday," and he pointed to the tall timepiece in the show window—the solemn-ticking clock by which many passersby set their watches. "The other clocks——"

"And they've all stopped at different times!" added Tremlain. "That's funny, too."

If anything could be funny in that place of death, this fact might be. And it was a fact. Of the many clocks in the store not one was ticking, and all pointed to different hours. The big regulator indicated 10:22; a chronometer in a showcase was five hours and some minutes ahead of that. The clock over Darcy's work table noted the hour of 7:56. Some cheaper clocks, alarms among them, on the shelves, which were usually going, showed various hours.

They had all stopped. Only the watch in the dead woman's hand was ticking, and that showed approximately the right time—a little after six o'clock.

"Well, we've got to get the police," said Casey. "Then I've got to travel on—customers waiting for me."

"You—you won't leave me here alone—will you?" asked Darcy.

"Isn't there any one else in the house?" asked Tremlain, for the living-rooms were above the jewelry store—a substantial brown stone building of the style of three decades ago.

"Only Sallie Page, the cook. She's deaf, and she'll be more of a nuisance than a help. Mrs. Darcy's maid won't be in until noon. I don't want to be left——"

"Oh, you won't be alone long," observed Casey. "The police will be here as soon as we send 'em word. And here's a crowd outside already."

There was one—made up of men and boys with, here and there, a factory girl on her way to work. They had seen the two milk wagons in front of the jewelry store—the store which, though most of the more valuable pieces were in the safe—still showed in the gleaming windows much that caught the eye of the passerby. Some one sensed the unusual. Some one stopped—then another. Some one had caught sight, on peering into the store, of the prostrate figure with that blotch of red in the white hair.

The crowd, increasing each minute, pressed against the still locked front doors. Those in the van flattened their noses against the glass in grotesque fashion.

"Hurry and get the police!" begged Darcy.

Casey was about to telephone, when Tremlain, who had gone out into the alley from the side door, hurried back to report:

"Here comes a cop now. Saw the crowd I guess. We can just tell him what we saw, Casey, and then slide along. I'm late as it is."

"So'm I!"

The policeman, his heavy-soled shoes creaking importantly, came along the street, hurrying not in the least. He knew whatever it was would keep for him.

"What's the row?" demanded Patrolman Mulligan.

"Looks like the old lady was murdered," Casey answered. "I was just going to telephone to headquarters." He told briefly what he knew, which was corroborated by Tremlain, then the two left to cover their routes, after giving their addresses to the policeman.

The crowd grew larger. From outside it looked like a convention of umbrellas. The rain still drizzled and turned to steam and mist as it warmed on the many bodies in the throng—a mist that mingled with that of the rain itself. In spite of the storm, the crowd grew and remained. Those who might be late at bench, lathe or loom unheeded the passing of time. It was not every day they could be so close to a murder.

The crowd filled the entire space in front of the jewelry store. The bolder spirits rattled the knob of the locked portals, and tapped on the glass that was now misty and grimy from hands and noses pressed against it. The crowd began to surge into the alley, whence a side door gave entrance into Mrs. Darcy's place. Some even ventured to press into the store itself—the store where the silent figure lay huddled between the showcases.

"Now then slide out of here—take a walk!" advised Mulligan, as he shoved out some of the men and boys who had entered. "Get out! You can read all about it in the papers. The re-

porters'll be here soon enough," he added with a wink at Darcy. "I'll lock the door and keep the crowd out. The sleuths can knock when they get here. Where's your 'phone. I'll have to report to the station."

Darcy pointed to the telephone, and the policeman, showing no more than a passing interest in the body, at which he glanced casually as he passed, called up his precinct and reported, being told to remain on guard until relieved.

"How'd it happen?" he asked, as he came back from the instrument and leaned against a showcase containing much glittering silver. "Who did it—when—how?"

"I haven't the least idea," replied Darcy, turning away so as not to see the faces now pressed against both the front and side doors, each being locked from the inside. "I found her just as she is now, and called in the milkmen, who happened to be passing. I had come down to the store early to do a little repair job, and the first thing I saw was—her!"

"What time did it happen?"

"I don't even know that. All the clocks have stopped. I don't usually wind the watches that are left for repair, unless I'm regulating them, and I haven't any like that in now. The only thing going is that one watch.

"What one watch? I do hear something tick-

ing," and the policeman looked at Darcy. "What watch?"

"The one—in her hand."

"Oh, I see! Hum! Well, we'll leave that for the county physician. He'll be here pretty soon I guess. They'll notify him from the precinct. Now how about last night—was there any row—any noise? Did you hear anything?"

"I didn't hear anything—much. There's always a lot of noise around here until after midnight—theaters and moving picture places let out about 11:30. I awoke once in the night. But I guess that doesn't matter."

"Anybody else in the house besides you?" and the policeman yawned—for he had gone out on dog-watch—and looked into the wet, shiny, drizzle-swept street.

"Only Sallie Page, the cook. I'll call her. There's Mrs. Darcy's maid—Jane Metson. But she went away yesterday afternoon and won't be back until about noon. It's past time Sallie was down to get breakfast. I'll call her——"

Darcy made a move as though to go to the rear of the store, whence a side door gave entrance to the stairs leading to the rooms above.

"I'll go with you," said Mulligan, and he shoved himself to an erect posture by forcing his elbows against the showcase on which he had been leaning in a manner to give himself as much

rest as possible without sitting down—it was a way he had, acquired from long patrolling of city streets.

"You—you'll go with me?" faltered Darcy.

"Yes, to call the cook. *She* won't run away," and he nodded toward the dead woman.

"Oh!" There was a world of meaning in Darcy's interjection. "You mean that I——"

"I don't mean nothin'!" broke in Mulligan. "I leave that to the gum-shoe men. Come on, if you want to call what's-her-name!"

It took some little time, by calling and pounding outside her door, to arouse deaf Sallie Page, and longer to make her understand that she was wanted. Then, just as Darcy had expected, she began to cry and moan when she heard her mistress was dead, and refused to come from her room. She had served the owner of the jewelry store for more than a score of years.

"Hark!" exclaimed Mulligan, as he and Darcy came downstairs after having roused Sallie Page. "What's that?"

"Some one is knocking," remarked his companion.

"Maybe it's the men from headquarters."

It was—Carroll and Thong, who always teamed it when there was a case of sufficient importance, as this seemed to be. They were insistently knocking at the side door, having forced their

way through the crowd that was still there—larger than ever, maintaining positions in spite of the dripping, driving, drizzling rain.

"Killed, eh?" murmured Carroll, as he bent over the body.

"Gun?" asked Thong, who was making a quick visual inventory of the interior of the place.

"No; doesn't seem so. Looks more like her head's been busted in. Hit with something. Doc Warren can 'tend to that end of it. Now let's get down to business. Who found her this way?"

"I did," answered Darcy.

"And who are you?"

"Her second cousin. Her name was Mrs. Amelia Darcy, and her husband and my father were first cousins. I have worked for her about seven years—ever since just after her husband died. She continued his business. It's one of the oldest in the city and——"

"Yes, I know all about that. Robbery here once—before your time. We got back some of the stuff for the old lady. She treated us pretty decent, too. When'd you find her like this?"

"About half an hour ago. I got up a little before six o'clock to do some repair work on a man's watch. He wanted to get the early train out of town."

"I see! And you found the old lady like this?" asked Carroll.

"Just like this—yes. Then I called in the milkmen——"

"I saw them," interrupted Mulligan. "I know 'em. They're all right, so I let 'em go. We can get 'em after they finish their routes."

"Um," assented Thong. "Anything gone from the store?" he asked Darcy.

"I haven't looked."

"Better take a look around. It's probably a robbery. You know the stock, don't you?"

"As well as she did herself. I've been doing the buying lately."

"Well, have a look. Who's that at the door?" he asked sharply, for a knock as of authority sounded—different from the aimless and impatient kickings and tappings of the wet throng outside.

"It's Daley from the *Times,*" reported Mulligan, peering out. He's all right. Shall I let him in?"

"Oh, yes, I guess so," assented Carroll, with a glance at Thong, who confirmed, by a nod of his head, what his partner said. He'll give us what's right. Let him in."

The reporter entered, nodded to the detectives, gave a short glance at the body, a longer one at Darcy, poked Mulligan in the ribs, lighted a cigarette, which he let hang from one lip where it gyrated in eccentric circles as he mumbled:

"What's the dope?"

"Don't know yet," answered Carroll. "The old lady's dead—murdered it looks like—and——"

"What's that?" interrupted Thong. "What's that ticking sound?"

"It's the watch—in her hand," replied Darcy, and his voice was a hoarse whisper.

CHAPTER II

KING'S DAGGER

CARROLL and Thong, proceeding along the lines they usually followed in cases like this, keeping to the rules which had come to them through the instructions of superior officers, and some which they had worked out for themselves, had, in a comparatively short time, ascertained the name, age and somewhat of the personal history of Mrs. Amelia Darcy, together with that of her cousin, as the detectives called him, though the relationship was not as close as that.

Mrs. Darcy, who was sixty-five years of age, had carried on the jewelry business of her husband, Mortimer Darcy, after his death, which preceded her more tragic one by about seven years. Mortimer Darcy had been a diamond salesman for a large New York house in his younger days, and had come to be an expert in precious stones. Many good wishes, and not a little trade, had gone to him from his former employers, and some of their customers bought of him when he went into business for himself in the thriving city of Colchester.

Knowing that to start anew in a strange town would mean uphill work for him and his wife, Mortimer Darcy had awaited an opportunity to buy the business of a man whom he had known for a number of years and to whom he had sold many diamonds and other stones. This man—Harrison Van Doren by name—had what was termed the best jewelry trade in Colchester. The "old" families—not that any of them could trace their ancestry back very far—liked to say that "we get all our stuff at Van Doren's."

This name, on little white plush-lined boxes, containing pins or sparkling rings, came to mean almost as much as some of the more expensive names in New York. Young ladies counted it a point in the favor of their lovers if the engagement circlet came from Van Doren's. And Mortimer Darcy, knowing the value of that class of trade, had, when he purchased Mr. Van Doren's business fostered that spirit. Mrs. Darcy, on the death of her husband, had further catered to it, so that the Darcy establishment, though it was not the richest or most showy in Colchester, was safely counted the most exclusive—that is, it had a full line of the best goods, be it clocks or diamonds, and it had what, in bygone days, was called a "carriage trade," but which is now referred to as "automobile."

That is to say, those, aside from a casual trade

with people who dropped in as they might have done to a grocery, to get what they really needed in the way of jewelry, came in gasolene or electric cars where their ancestors had come with horses and carriage.

So Darcy's jewelry store was known, and though a bit old-fashioned in a way, was favorably known, not only to the older members of the rich families of the place, but to the younger set as well. The pretty girls and their well-groomed companions of the "Assembly Ball" set liked to stop in there for their rings, brooches, scarfpins or cuff links, and very frequent were the rather languid orders:

"You may send it, charge."

It was to that class of trade that Mrs. Darcy catered. She understood it, and it understood her. That was enough. She took a personal interest in the business to the extent of being in the store almost every day, as her husband had been before her, to advise and be available for consultation, whether it was the buying of a gold teething ring for the newest member of the family, an engagement ring for the latest debutante, a watch for "son," attaining his majority, or perhaps new gold glasses for grandpapa or grandmama.

The store was not a large one, and four clerks, one a young woman, with James Darcy and an assistant, who looked after the repair work and

made anything unusual in the way of pins or rings, constituted the force. But Mrs. Darcy was as good as a clerk herself, and during the holiday rush she was in the store night and day. This was the easier for her, since she owned the building in which her display was kept, and lived in a quiet and tastefully furnished apartment over the store.

On the death of her husband, she had sent for his second cousin, who at that time was in the employ of a well-known New York jewelry house, and he agreed to come to her.

Rather more than a repair man and clerk was James Darcy. He was an expert jewelry designer and a setter of precious stones; and often, when some fastidious customer did not seem to care for what was shown from the glittering trays in the showcases, Mrs. Darcy or one of her clerks would say:

"We will have Mr. Darcy design something different for you."

"That's what I want," the customer would say—"something different—something you don't see everywhere."

And so the Darcy trade had grown and prospered.

"Well, let's hear what you have to say," said Carroll, after James Darcy had given what the detectives considered was, for the time, a suf-

ficient history of himself and his relative, and had hastily gone over such of the stock as was kept outside the safe. The latter had not been forced open—it did not take long to ascertain that. "Is anything gone?"

"I can't say for sure," answered the young man—he was this side of thirty. His long, artistic fingers were trembling, and he felt weak and faint. "But if there has been a robbery they didn't get much. The safe hasn't been opened, and the best of the goods—all the diamonds and other stones—are in that. Nothing seems to be gone from the cases, though I'd have to make a better search, and go over the inventory, to make certain."

"Well, let that go for the time. How'd you find things when you came downstairs? What happened during the night? Any of the doors or windows forced?" and the detective fairly shot these questions at Darcy.

"I think not. The front door was locked, just as it is now. I went out the side one. That was locked with the spring catch from the inside."

"Wasn't it bolted?" came sharply from Thong.

"I didn't notice about that. You see, I was all excited like——"

"Yes," assented Thong.

"There's a bolt on the door!" Carroll snapped.

"Yes, but Mrs. Darcy may have slipped it back

herself. She was down first, though why, I can't say. She seldom came down ahead of me, especially of late years. I generally opened the store. The clerks report at eighty-thirty—there's some of 'em now."

More knockings had sounded on the front door, and the faces of two young men peered in through the misty glass, the crowd having made a lane for them on learning that they worked in the place of death.

"Let 'em in, sure!" assented Thong. "We got to talk to all of 'em! Let 'em in!"

Darcy did so, Mulligan helping him keep back the crowd of curious ones.

"Here comes Miss Brill," said one of the men clerks to Darcy. "What's the matter? Is Mrs. Darcy—?"

"Dead! Killed, I'm afraid! The store won't open to-day, but the police want to see every one. Oh, Miss Brill, come in!" and he held out his hand to the one young woman clerk, who drew back in horrified fright as she saw the silent figure on the floor.

"Oh—Oh!" she gasped, and then she went into hysterics, adding to the excitement and giving Mulligan a bad five minutes while he fought to keep the crowd from surging in.

But when Miss Brill had been carried to a rear room and quieted, and when the shades had

been drawn to keep the curious ones from peering in, the questioning of Darcy was resumed.

"Did you come directly down to the store from your room?" asked Thong.

"Yes. As soon as I awakened."

"Where is your room?"

"In the rear, on the second floor—the one next above. Mrs. Darcy has her rooms in front. Then come those of her maid, Jane Metson. Sallie Page sleeps on the top floor where the janitor's family lives, and he, of course, sleeps up there also."

"I see," murmured Carroll. "Then you came downstairs and found Mrs. Darcy lying here—dead?"

"I wasn't sure she was dead—"

"Oh, she was *dead* all right," broke in Thong. "No question about that. Did you hear anything?"

"Only the watch ticking in her hand. First I thought it was her heart beating."

"No, I mean did you hear anything in the night?" went on the detective. "Any queer noise? It's mighty funny if there was murder done and no robbery. But of course she might have heard a noise if you didn't, and she might have come down to find out what it was about. She might have caught a burglar at work, and he may have killed her to get away. But if it

was a burglar it's funny you didn't hear any noise—like a fall, or something. How about that, Mr. Darcy?"

"Well, no. I didn't exactly hear anything. I went to bed about half past ten, after working at my table down here awhile."

"Was Mrs. Darcy in bed then?" Thong asked.

"I couldn't say. She had gone to her apartment, but I don't have to pass near that to get to my room. I came straight up and went to bed."

"At ten o'clock, you say?"

"A little after. It may have been a quarter to eleven."

"And you didn't hear anything all night?" Carroll shot this question at Darcy suddenly.

"No—no—not exactly. I did hear *something*—it wasn't exactly a noise—and yet it was a noise."

"What kind of talk is that?" demanded Thong roughly. "Either it was a noise or it wasn't! Now which was it?"

"Well, if you call a clock striking a noise, then it was one."

"Oh, a clock struck!" and Thong settled back in his chair more at his ease. His manner seemed to indicate that he was on the track of something.

"Yes, a clock struck. It was either three or four, I can't be sure which," Darcy replied. "You know when you awaken in the night, and hear

the strokes, you can't be sure you haven't missed some of the first ones. I heard three, anyhow, I'm sure of that."

"Well, put it down as three," suggested Thong. "Was it the striking of the clock that awakened you?"

"No, not exactly. It was more as if some one had been in my room."

"Some one in your room!" exclaimed both detectives. They were questioning Darcy in the living-room of Mrs. Darcy's suite, the clerks being detained downstairs by Mulligan. The county physician, who was also the coroner, had not yet arrived.

"Yes, at first I thought some one had been in my room, and then, after I thought about it, I wasn't quite sure. All I know is I slept quite soundly—sounder than usual in fact, and, all at once, I heard a clock strike."

"Three or four," murmured Thong.

"Yes; three anyhow—maybe four. Something awakened me suddenly; but what, I can't say. I remember, at the time, it felt as though something had passed over my face."

"Like a hand?" suggested Carroll.

"Well, I couldn't be sure. It may have been I dreamed it."

"But what did it *feel* like?" insisted Thong.

"Well, like a cloth brushing my face more than

like a hand—or it may have been a hand with a glove on it. Yes, it may have been that. Then I tried to arouse myself, but I heard the wind blowing and a sprinkle of rain, and, as my window was open, I thought the curtain might have blown across my face. That would account for it I reasoned, so—"

"Yes, it *may* have been the curtain," said Thong, slowly. "But what did you do?"

"Nothing. I lay still a little while, and then I went to sleep again. I was only awake maybe two or three minutes."

"You didn't call Mrs. Darcy?"

"No."

"Nor the servant—what's her name? Sallie?"

"No. There wasn't any use in that. She's deaf."

"And you didn't call the janitor?"

"No. I wasn't very wide awake, and I didn't really attach any importance to it until after I saw her—dead."

"Um! Yes," murmured Carroll. "Well, then you went to sleep again. What did you do next?"

"I awakened with a sudden start just before six o'clock. I had not set an alarm, though I wanted to get up early to do a little repair job I had promised for early this morning. But I have gotten so in the habit of rousing at almost any hour I mentally set for myself the night be-

fore, that I don't need an alarm clock. I had fixed my mind on the fact that I wanted to get up at five-thirty, and I think it was just a quarter to six when I got up. I was anxious to finish the repair job for a man who was to leave on an early train this morning. He may be in any time now, and I haven't it ready for him."

"What sort of a repair job?" asked Carroll.

"On a watch."

"Where's the watch now?" and the detective flicked the ashes from a cigar the reporter had given him. Daley was down in the jewelry store, interviewing the clerks while Darcy was on the grill up above.

"The watch," murmured Darcy. "It—it's in her hand," and he nodded in the direction of the silent figure downstairs.

"The watch that is still ticking?"

"Yes, but the funny part of it is that the watch wasn't going last night, when I planned to start work on it. I forget just why I didn't do it," and Darcy seemed a bit confused, a point not lost sight of by Carroll. "I guess it must have been because I couldn't see well with the electric light on my work table," went on the jewelry worker. "I've got to get that fixed. Anyhow I didn't do anything to the Indian's watch more than look at it, and I made up my mind to rise early and hurry it through. So I didn't even wind it. I can't

understand what makes it go, unless some one got in and wound it—and they wouldn't do that."

"Whose watch is it?" asked Thong.

"It belongs to Singa Phut."

"Singa Phut!" ejaculated Carroll. "Crimps, what a name! Who belongs to it?"

"Singa Phut is an East Indian," explained Darcy. He has a curio store down on Water Street. We have bought some odd things from him for our customers, queer bead necklaces and the like. He left the watch with my cousin, who told me to repair it. It needed a new case-spring and some of the screws were loose."

"How did Mrs. Darcy come to have the watch in her hand?" Carroll demanded.

"That I couldn't say."

"What sort of a man is this Indian—Singa—Singa—" began Thong, hesitatingly.

"Singa Phut is a quiet, studious Indian," answered Darcy. "He has not lived here very long, but I knew him in New York. He has done business with me for some years."

"Is he all right—safe—not one of them gars—you know, the fellows that use a silk cord to strangle you with?" asked Thong, who had some imagination regarding garroters.

"Not at all like that," said Darcy, and there was the trace of a smile on his face. "He is a gentleman."

"Oh," said Carroll and Thong in unison.

There came another knock on the side door downstairs. There was less of a crowd about now, and Mulligan did not have to keep back a rush as he opened the portal.

"Dr. Warren," reported the policeman, calling upstairs to Carroll and Thong.

"The county physician," explained Carroll. "Better come down and meet him, Mr. Darcy. He'll want to ask you some questions. Then we'll have another go at you. Got to ask a lot of questions in a case like this," he half apologized.

"Oh, sure," assented the jewelry worker.

"Doc Warren, eh," mused Thong to his partner, as Darcy preceded them downstairs. "Now we'll know what killed her, and we'll have something to start on—maybe."

"I think we've got something already," observed Carroll.

"Oh, yes—maybe—and then—again—maybe *not.* Come on!"

"Morning boys! Nice crisp day—if you say it quick!" cried the county physician, as he shook the rain from his coat and tossed his auto gloves on a shiny glass showcase. "Second time this week you've got me out of bed before my time. What's the matter, if they've got to have a murder, with doing it in the afternoon? I like my sleep!"

He was smiling and cheerful, was Dr. Warren. Murders and autopsies were all in the day's work with him. He had been county physician for a number of years.

"Hum, yes! quite an old lady," he mused as he took off his coat, which Carroll held for him. The doctor rolled up his shirt sleeves and stooped down. "Head's badly cut—let's see what we have here. Let's have a light, it's too dark to see."

One of the clerks switched on more electric lights, and they glinted and sparkled on the silver and cut glass. They flashed on the white, still face, and the gleams seemed to be swallowed up in that red blotch in the snowy hair.

"Um, yes! Depressed fracture. Bad place, too. Shouldn't wonder but what it had done the trick. Might have been from a black-jack?" and he glanced questioningly at the detectives.

Carroll shook his head in negation.

"That'll crack a skull, but it won't draw blood—not if it's used right," and he brought from his hip pocket one of the weapons in question—a short, stout flexible reed, covered with leather, the end forming a pocket in which was a chunk of lead.

"I'll gamble it wasn't one of *them,*" said Carroll.

"Maybe not," assented the doctor. "Let's look a bit further."

He glanced at the floor about the body, peered

around the edge of a showcase, underneath which there was a space for refuse—odds and ends, discarded wrapping paper and the like—a place into which neither of the detectives had, as yet, glanced. Dr. Warren uttered an exclamation, and drew out a metal statue, about two feet high.

It was that of a hunter, standing as though he had just delivered a shot, and was peering to see the effect. The butt of his gun projected behind him, and as Dr. Warren moved the statue into the light of the jewelry store chandeliers, they all saw, clinging to the stock of the gun, some straggling, white hairs.

"That's what did it!" exclaimed the county physician. "I'll wager, when I try, I can fit that gun butt into the depression of the fracture. The burglar—or whoever it was—swung this statue as a club. It would make a deadly one, using the foot end for a handle," and Dr. Warren waved the ornament in the air over the dead woman's head to illustrate what he meant.

"Don't!" muttered Darcy in a strained voice.

"Don't what?" asked the physician sharply.

"Use the statue that way."

"Why not?"

"Well—er—I—we were going to buy it for our new home. But now— Oh, I never want to see it in the house! I couldn't bear to look at it—nor could she!"

"She? We? What do you mean?" asked Carroll quickly. "Say, do you know something about this killing that you're keeping back from us?"

He took a step nearer Darcy—a threatening step it would seem, from the fact that the jewelry worker drew back as if in alarm.

"No, I don't know anything," said Darcy in a low voice.

"Then what's this talk about the statue—not wanting it in the house—*whose* house?"

"The house I hope to live in with my wife—Miss Amy Mason," answered Darcy, and he spoke in calm contrast to his former excitement. "We are going to be married in the fall," he went on. "I had asked Mrs. Darcy to set that statue aside for me. Miss Mason admired it, and I planned to buy it. We had the place all picked out where it would stand. But—now—"

He did not finish, but a shudder seemed to shake his frame.

"It would be a rather grewsome object to have around after it had killed the old lady," murmured the reporter. "But are you sure it did, Doc?"

"Pretty sure, yes. I never make a statement, though, until after the autopsy. No telling what that may develop. I'll get at it right away. I guess you remember that Murray case," he went on, to no one in particular. "There they all thought the man was murdered, when, as a matter

of fact he had been taken with a heart spell, fell downstairs, and a knife he had in his hand pierced his heart."

"That wasn't your case, Doc," observed Carroll.

"No, it was before my time. But I remember it. That's why I'm saying nothing until I've made an examination. Better 'phone the morgue keeper," he went on, "and have them come for the body."

"Have you—have you got to take her away?" faltered Darcy.

"Yes. I'm sorry, but it wouldn't do—here," and the doctor motioned to the glittering array of cut glass and plate. "You won't keep the store open?" he inquired.

"No. I'll put a notice in the door now," and Darcy wrote out one which a clerk affixed to the front door for him.

"Well, that's all I can do now," Dr. Warren said, after his very perfunctory examination. "The rest will have to be at the morgue. Got a place where I can wash my hands?" he asked.

Darcy indicated a little closet near his work bench. Dr. Warren soon resumed his coat, accepted a cigarette from Daley, slipped into his still damp rain-garment and was soon throbbing down the street in his automobile, having announced that he was going to breakfast and would perform the autopsy immediately afterward.

Soon a black wagon rattled up to the jewelry store, bringing fresh acquisitions to the crowd, which persisted in staying in spite of the rain, which had now changed from a drizzle to a more pronounced downpour.

More reporters came, and Daley fraternized with them, the newspaper men aside from the police and Jim Haliday, a detective from Prosecutor Bardon's office, being the only people admitted to the shop, when the clerks had been sent home.

The morgue keeper's men lifted the fast stiffening body and were about to place it in the wicker carrier when Carroll, who was watching them rather idly, uttered an exclamation.

"What's up?" asked Thong quickly. He had been strolling about the shop, and had come to a stop near Darcy's work table—a sort of bench against the wall, and behind one of the showcases. The bench was fitted with a lathe, and on it were parts of watches, like the dead specimens preserved in alcohol in a doctor's office. "What's up, Bill?"

"Look!" exclaimed Carroll, pointing.

The men from the morgue had the body raised in the air. And then, in the gleam from the electric lights there was revealed underneath and in the left side of the dead woman a clean slit through her light dress—a slit the edges of which were stained with blood.

"Another wound!" exclaimed Daley, his newspaper instincts quickly aroused by this addition of evidence of mystery. "This is getting interesting!"

"It's a cut—a deep one, too," murmured Carroll, as he drew nearer to look. "Wonder what did it?"

"Shouldn't wonder but it was done with this!" and Thong held out, on the palm of his large hand, a slender dagger, on the otherwise bright blade of which were some dark stains.

"Where'd you get it?" demanded Carroll.

"Over on the watch repair table."

Darcy gasped.

"Is that *your* dagger?" snapped Carroll at the jewelry worker.

"It isn't a dagger—it's a paper-cutter—a magazine knife."

"Well, whatever it is, who owns it?" The words were as crisp as the steel of the stained blade.

Darcy stared at the keen knife, and then at the dead woman.

"Who owns it?" and the question snapped like a whip.

"I don't! It was left here by—"

There was a commotion at the side door, which had been opened by Mulligan in order that the men might carry out the body of Mrs. Darcy. There

was a shuffling of feet, and a rather thick and unsteady voice asked:

"Whash matter here? Place on fire? Looks like devil t'pay! Let me in. Shawl right, offisher. Got a right t' come in, I have! I got something here. 'Svaluable, too! Don't want that all burned —spoil shings have 'em burned.

"'Lo, Darcy!" went on a young man, who walked unsteadily into the jewelry store. "Wheresh tha' paper cutter I left for you t' 'grave Pearl's name on? Got take it home now. Got take her home some—someshing—square myself. Been out al'night—you know how 'tish! Take wifely home li'l preshent—you know how 'tish. Gotta please wifely when you—hic—been out al' night. Wheresh my gold-mounted paper cutter, Darcy?"

"Harry King, and stewed to the gills again!" murmured Pete Daley. "Wow! he has some bun on!"

"Wheresh my paper cutter, Darcy?" went on King, smiling in a fashion meant to be merry, but which was fixed and glassy as to his eyes. "Wheresh my li'l preshent for wifely? Got her name all 'graved on it nice an' pretty? Thash what'll square wifely when I been out—hic—al'night. Wheresh my paper cutter, Darcy, ol' man?"

Silently the jewelry worker pointed to the

stained dagger—it was really that, though designed for a paper cutter. The detective held it out, and the red spots on it seemed to show brighter in the gleam of the electric lights.

"Is that your knife, Harry King?" demanded Thong.

"Sure thash mine! Bought it in li'l ole N' York lash week. Didn't have no name on it—brought it here for my ole fren', Darcy, t' engrave. Put wifely's name on—her namesh Pearl—P-e-a-r-l!" and he spelled it out laboriously and thickly.

"My wife—she likes them things. Me—I got no use for 'em. Gimme oyster fork—or clam, for that matter—an' a bread n' butter knife—'n I'm all right. But gotta square wife somehow. Take her home nice preshent. Thatsh me—sure thash mine!" and carefully trying to balance himself, he reached forward as though to take the stained dagger from the hand of the detective.

"You got Pearl's name 'graved on it, Darcy, ole man?" asked King, thickly, licking his hot and feverish lips.

"No," answered the jewelry worker, hollowly.

Then Harry King, seemingly for the first time, became aware that all was not well in the place he had entered. He turned and saw the body of the murdered woman as the men from the morgue started out with it. He started back as though some one had struck him a blow.

"Is she—is she dead?" he gasped. "Dead—Mrs. Darcy?"

"Looks that way," said Carroll in cool tones. "You'd better come in here and sit down a while, Harry," he went on, and he led the unsteady young man to the rear room, while the men from the morgue carried out the lifeless body.

CHAPTER III

THE FISHERMAN

FROM a little green book, which, from the evidence of its worn covers, seemed to have been much read, the tall, military-appearing occupant of a middle seat in the parlor car of the express to Colchester scanned again this passage:

"And if you rove for perch with a minnow, then it is best to be alive, you sticking your hook through his back fin, or a minnow with the hook in his upper lip, and letting him swim up and down about mid-water, or a little lower, and you still keeping him about that depth with a cork, which ought to be a very little one; and the way you are to fish for perch with a small frog—"

"Ah-a-a-a!"

It was a long-drawn exclamation of anticipatory delight, and into the eyes of the military-looking traveler there appeared a soft and gentle light, as though, in fancy, he could look off across sunlit meadows to a stream sparkling beneath a blue sky, white-studded with fleecy clouds, where there was a soft carpet of green grass, shaded by a noble oak under which he might lounge and listen to the wind rustling the newly-born leaves.

"Ah-a-a-a!"

"Beg pardon, sir, but I—"

"What?"

The military-appearing man sat up with a jerk into sudden stiffness, while the soft light died out of his eyes.

"New York papers?"

"Don't want the New York papers—any of them!"

The man, after a swift glance from his green-covered book, again let his eyes seek its pages. The ghost of a smile flickered around his lips.

"Chicago, then. The latest—"

". . . your hook being fastened through the skin of his leg, toward the upper part of it; and lastly I will give you—"

"Something livelier in the way of reading, sir, if you wish it!" broke in the voice of the newsboy who had stopped beside the parlor-car chair of the military-looking traveler, interrupting the reading of the little green-covered book. "I have a new detective story—"

"Look here! If you interrupt me again when I'm reading my Izaak Walton I'll have you put off the train! Gad! I will, sir, if I have to do it myself!"

The military-appearing traveler snapped the green book against the palm of one hand with a report like that of a pistol, thereby causing an old

lady, asleep in a chair across the aisle, to awaken with a start.

"Are we in? Have we arrived? Is this Colchester?" she asked, sitting up and looking about in startled surprise, her bonnet very much askew. The newsboy, with an abashed air, slid down the aisle.

"Madam, I sincerely beg your pardon," said the tall man who had caused the commotion. He arose, his green book in one hand, and bowed his apologies. "I regret exceedingly that I startled you. But that insufferable young puppy had the extreme audacity to inflict himself on me when I was reading, and I lost my temper. I am sorry but I—"

"You didn't *strike* him, did you?" asked the old lady, reproachfully.

"No, madam. Though such conduct would have been justified on my part, I merely spoke to him. It was this—this book that I used rather roughly and which awakened you."

"Then aren't we at Colchester yet?"

"No, madam. It is some little ride yet. If you will allow me I shall be happy to let you know when we arrive. And if you are without any one to help you off with your luggage, as it is raining and likely to continue—"

"Oh, thank you, sir, but Jabez will meet me. I must have dozed off, and when I heard that noise—"

"Which I regret exceedingly, madam," interposed the military-appearing traveler with another bow.

The old lady again composed herself. The tall man bowed again, resumed his seat and tried to read, but his feelings had been too much ruffled, it was evident, to allow a peaceful resumption of his former mood.

"The idea! The very idea!" he murmured, speaking to the window, against the glass of which the raindrops were now dashing impotently, and as though angry at not being admitted to the warmth and light of the car. For dusk had fallen and the electric lights were aglow in the Pullman, making it a very cosy place in contrast to the damp and muddy country through which the train was rushing.

"Gad! what's the world coming to when a man can't read what he likes without every whippersnapper interrupting him with— Shag! I say, Shag!" he went on, raising his voice from a murmured whisper to a louder command. "Porter, send my man here! Where's that rascal Shag?"

"Yes, sah, Colonel! I'm right yeah! Yeah I is, Colonel!" and a negro, with a picturesque fringe of white, kinky hair, shuffled from the porter's quarters, where he had been enjoying a quiet chat with the black knight of the whisk broom. "What is you' desire, Colonel?"

"I want peace and quiet, Shag! That's what I want! Twice I've tried to read my book undisturbed, and that insufferable train-boy—that rascal who probably doesn't know an ant-fly from a piece of cheese—has bothered me with books and papers. He ought to know I've vowed not to look at a paper for two weeks, and, as for books—"

Colonel Robert Lee Ashley closed his volume, which bore, in gold letters on the front green cover the words: "Walton's Complete Angler," and laughed silently, the wrinkles of his face and around his steel-blue eyes sending the frown scurrying for some unseen trench.

"Shag," asked the colonel, still chuckling, "what do you think that nincompoop had the infernal audacity to offer me in the way of a book?"

"I ain't got no idea, Colonel—not th' leastest in th' world!"

"He offered me a—detective story, Shag!"

"Oh, mah good Lord, Colonel! Not *really?*"

"Yes, he did, Shag! A detective story!"

"Oh, mah good Lord!"

Shag, which was all Colonel Ashley ever called his servant, though the colored valet rejoiced in the prefixes of George Washington, threw up his hands in horror, and shook his head. The colonel, after a period of silent, chuckling mirth, opened his book again and read:

"And, after this manner, you may catch a trout in a hot evening. When, as you walk by a brook, and shall hear or see him leap at flies, then if you get a grasshopper—"

"Gad! that's the life!" softly voiced the colonel. Then, turning to the still waiting Shag, he went on: "There's nobody in the wide world who can bring peace and quiet to an angry mind like my friend Izaak Walton, is there, Shag?"

"No, sah, Colonel, they isn't! *Nobody!*"

"Of course not! Gad! I'm glad you agree with me, Shag!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel."

"Um! Here, you go and give that newsboy a quarter. Tell him I didn't mean anything; but never again must he interrupt me when he sees me with Walton in my hand. Anything but that! It's positively indecent!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel. I done tell him that."

"And it—it's sacrilegious, Shag!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel; 'tis that!"

"Well, tell him so, and give him a half dollar. Now don't disturb me again until we get to Colchester. How's the weather, Shag?"

"Well, sah, Colonel, it's—it's sorter—moist, Colonel!"

"Um! Well, it'll be better by to-morrow, I expect, when we go fishing. And be careful of my rods when you take the grips off. If you so much

as scratch the tip of even my oldest one, I—I'll—well, you know what I'll do to you, Shag!"

"Yes, sah, I knows, Colonel!"

"Very well. Give that boy a dollar. Maybe he never read Walton, and that's why he's so ignorant."

Colonel Ashley settled back in his chair, and, with unfurrowed brow, read on:

". . . you shall see or hear him leap at flies, then if you get a grasshopper, put it on your hook with your line about two yards long, standing behind a bush or tree where his hole is—"

Once more the colonel was happy.

Shag sought out the discomfited newsboy, and, chuckling as had his master, handed the lad a dollar.

"Say, what's this for?" questioned the lad, in astonishment.

"Colonel done say to give it to you fo' hurtin' yo' feelin's."

"He did! Great! Say, does he want a book—a paper? Say, I got a swell detective story—"

The boy started out of the compartment.

"Oh, mah good Lord! Fo' th' love of honey cakes, don't!" gasped Shag, grabbing him just in time. "Does yo' know who the colonel is?"

"No, but he's mighty white if he wants to buy a dollar's worth of books and papers. I haven't sold much on this trip, but if he—"

"But he *don't* want to, boy! Don't you understan'? Jes' listen to me right now! De colonel don't want nothin' but Walton an' his angle worms!"

"Who's Walton? What road's he travel on?"

"He don't travel. He's daid, I reckon. But he done writ a book on fishin' poles, an' dat's all the colonel reads when he ain't workin' much. It's a book 'bout angle worms as neah as I kin make out."

"You mean Izaak Walton's Complete Angler, I guess," said a man, who passed by just then on his way to the smoking compartment, and he smiled genially at Shag.

"Dat's it, yes, sah! I knowed it had suffin t' do wif angle worms. Well, boy, dat book's all de colonel ever reads when he's vacationin', an' dat's whut he's doin' now—jest vacationin'.

"When we start away dis mawnin' he say to me, the colonel did: 'Now, Shag, I don't want t' be boddered wif nuffin'. I don't want t' read no papers. I don't want t' heah 'bout no battles, murder an' sudden deaths. I jest wants peace an' quiet an' fish!' He done come up heah t' go fishin' laik he go t' lots other places, though he ain't been heah fo' good many years. An' boy, he specially tell me *not* t' let him be boddered wif book agents."

"I ain't a book agent," objected the train-boy.

"I knows you ain't," admitted Shag. "I knows

yo' ain't, but yo' sells books, an' dat's whut's de trouble. Whut kind of a book did yo' offer de colonel jest now?"

"A detective story. And say! it's a swell one, let me tell you!"

"Oh, mah good Lord!" ejaculated Shag. "Dat's de wustest ever!" and he doubled up with silent mirth.

"Why, what's the matter with that?" asked the boy. "I've seen heaps of men read detective stories. Judge Dolan—he rides on my train a lot—and he's always askin' what I got new in detective stuff."

"Um, yep! Well, dat may be all right fo' Judge Dolan," went on Shag, slowly recovering from his fit of chuckling, "but mah marster don't want none of dat kind of readin'."

"Why?" asked the boy.

Shag's answer was given in a peculiar manner. He looked around carefully, and saw that the strange man had moved on and they were alone. Then, leaning toward the newsboy and whispering, the negro said:

"My marster, Colonel Brentnall—dat ain't his real name, but it's de one he goes by sometimes—he don't care fo' no detective stories 'cause he done make his livin' an' mine too, at detectin'. He says he don't ever want t' read 'em, 'cause dey ain't at all like whut happens. De colonel was one

of de biggest private detectives in de United States, boy! He's sorter retired now, but still he's chock full of crimes, murder an' stuff laik dat, an' dat's why he done sent yo' away sorter rough-laik."

"You say he's a private detective?" asked the boy, his eyes opening wide.

"Dat's whut he is."

"And his name is Colonel Brentnall?"

"Well, honey, dat ain't his *real* name. He don't laik t' use dat promiscuious laik, 'cause so many folks bodder him. If I was t' tell yo' his real name yo'd open yo' eyes wider yet. But take it from me," went on Shag, "he don't need no books t' make excitin' readin' fo' him! He's been froo it fo' yeahs!"

"Sufferin' tadpoles!" murmured the boy. "And to think I was offering *him* a detective yarn! Say, no wonder he flew at me!"

"He didn't mean nothin'," said Shag, still chuckling as he thought of the scene. "It's jest his way."

The train rumbled on through the early night, and in his comfortable chair Colonel Ashley read his Walton, the ingratiating humor of the dear, old fisherman gradually dispelling all other thoughts.

Colonel Ashley at this stage of his career, was almost an international figure. Having served with

distinction in the Spanish-American war, among his exploits being the capture of a number of spies in a sensational manner, he had become the head of the police department in a large city in the East.

He had continued the work begun in the army —a branch of the secret service—and had built up the city's detective department in an almost marvelous manner, he himself being one of its keenest sleuths. Desiring more time to devote to the detection of crimes of other than ordinary interest, and realizing that the routine of police work was too hampering for him, the colonel had opened an office in New York, where, straightway, he received from the government and private persons more work than he could well attend to. Now that he was getting old, he had some able assistants, but most cases still received his own attention at some stage of their development. This was characteristic of the colonel. He was always going to retire, in fact he said he had, but, somehow or other, it was like a singer's farewell, always postponed.

"And now, Shag, don't forget what I told you," he said to his attendant as the train drew into Colchester. "Don't you so much as scratch the varnish on the tip of one of my rods. And if you let me hear a whisper of anything bordering on a *case* you and I part company—do you hear?"

"I heahs yo' Colonel!" and the negro saluted, for the detective still clung to many of his military associations. Then, having kept his promise in seeing that the old lady was safely helped from the train, Colonel Ashley followed his valet, burdened with bags and rods.

The fishing rods Shag carried, he must have managed to transport safely to the hotel the colonel was to occupy for a two weeks' vacation and rest, for the military detective was smiling and good-natured when he took them from their cases and gently placed them on the bed.

"Anything else, Colonel?" asked Shag, when he had laid out his master's clothes, and was preparing to go to his own apartment in an annex to the hotel.

"No, I guess that's all, Shag. But what's your hurry? You aren't usually in such haste to leave me, even if you have laid out all my duds. What's the matter? Got some friends in town?"

"Oh, no, sah, Colonel! No, indeedy! 'tain't dat at all!"

"Well, what is it? Why are you in such haste to get away?"

"Um! Ah! Well, I don't laiks fo' t' tell yo' Colonel!" and Shag seemed uneasy.

"You don't like to tell me? Look here, you black rascal! don't try to hide anything from me, do you hear? You know me, and—"

"Oh, indeedy I does know yo', Colonel! Dat's jest why I don't wan t' tell yo'! It—it's 'bout one ob dem t'ings!"

"What things? Shag, you rascal, look here! Have you been buying a newspaper?"

"Ye—ye—yes, sah, Colonel, I has! But I done bought it fo' mahse'f. Deed an' I wasn't goin' t' let yo' hab so much as a snift at it, Colonel! De train-boy, whut yo' gib a dollar t', he handed it t' me when I was gittin' off. It's one ob de papers gotten out right yeah in dis city, an'—"

"Well, out with it, Shag! What's in it that's so mighty interesting?"

"Er—Colonel—yo' see—yo' done tole me—"

"Oh, out with it, Shag! I'll forgive you, I suppose. What is it?"

"Well, Colonel, sah, de paper done got in it an 'count ob a strange an' mysterious murder case, an'—"

"I knew it! I knew it! I could almost have taken my oath on it!" cried the excitable colonel. "Here I come to this place to have some quiet fishing in the suburbs, to get a complete rest, and yet not be too far from civilization, and no sooner do I get off the train than there's a murder mystery thrust right under my nose! Right under my nose! By Gad! I knew it!"

Shag stood, resting his weight first on one foot

and then on the other, his head bowed. He was trying to keep from slipping from under his vest, where he had hidden it, a newspaper, with glaring, black headlines. Shag looked timidly at his master.

Colonel Ashley paced up and down the room, pausing now and then to listen to the dash of rain against the windows, for the storm, bearing out its promise of the morning, had lasted all day, changing from a drizzle to a downpour and from a downpour to a drizzle with dismal repetition. The colonel glanced at Shag, and then, drawing from an inner pocket the little green book, read:

"Hunting is a game for princes and noble persons. It hath been highly prized in all ages. It was one of the qualifications—"

The detective snapped the book shut, and tossed it on the bed.

"Shag!" he exploded.

"Yes, sah, Colonel."

"You've often heard me talk of fishing and hunting, haven't you?"

"Deed an' I has, Colonel; many a time! Yes, sah!"

"Humph! Yes! Well, detective work is a sort of hunt, isn't it, Shag?"

"Yes, sah, Colonel. Dat's jest what it is! Many an' many a time I'se done heah yo' say yo's goin' out t' hunt dis man or dat woman!"

"Very good, Shag. And it's a sort of fishing, too, isn't it?"

"Yes, sah, Colonel! More as once I'se heah yo' say as how yo' had t' fish an' fish an' *fish* t' git a bit of a clew."

"I see you remember, Shag. Well, now, you black rascal, did you say you've got a newspaper with an account in it of a strange and mysterious murder right here in *this* city?"

"Yes, sah, Colonel! Right yeah in Colchester, where we done come t' hab puffick rest an' quiet an' fishin', just laik yo' done said on de train."

"Humph! A murder mystery right here in town. I thought I heard the newsboys shouting something about it at the station. But I didn't listen. Who's killed, Shag?"

"Why, Colonel, sah, it's a poor ole lady, an'—"

"Stop, Shag! Not another word! How dare you try to get me interested in a case when I told you if you so much as breathed anything about one I'd horsewhip you! I told you that, didn't I?"

"Deed an' yo' did, Colonel!"

The detective paced up and down the room. He reached for the little green book. Then, as if in desperation, he turned to the shrinking negro and went on:

"You say there's a mystery about it, Shag?"

"Yes, sah, Colonel. Yes, sah!" and he made

a motion toward the paper that was slipping from under his vest.

"Stop it!" cried the colonel. "I came here to fish and read Izaak Walton in the shade of a big tree along some quiet brook. If you so much as bring a paper into this room I'll send you back to Virginia where you belong, Shag!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel!"

The military-looking detective resumed his pacing of the room, his hands behind his back clasping and unclasping nervously.

"Shag!" he suddenly called.

"Yes, sah, Colonel."

"Is it much of a mystery—I mean—er— anything but the usual blood and thunder stuff?"

"Why, Colonel," began the black man eagerly, "it's de beatenist mystery dat ever was—all 'bout a murdered jewelry lady, what's got her haid busted in with a big gold statue, an' a gold knife stab in her side, an' a watch shut up tight in her hand, tickin' an' tickin' an' *tickin',* laik it was her heart beatin', an' her cousin done find her in a pool of blood on de floor, an' de clocks all stopped, an' a rich young spendthrift comes in an' claims de dagger, an' de detectives—"

"Shag!" fairly shouted his master.

"Yes, sah, Colonel!"

"Out of the room this instant, and don't you dare come back until I send for you!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel."

The old colored man turned slowly to the door. His manner was dejected. Evidently he had given serious offense.

Silently he turned the knob, but, before he had stepped over the threshhold, he heard a voice calling softly:

"Shag!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel."

"Eh—Shag—before you go, you—er—you might leave me that paper I see under your vest. I may have occasion to—to glance at it, to see what to-morrow's weather is going to be for fishing."

"Yes, sah, Colonel."

And, with a carefully concealed grin on his face, Shag drew the black-lettered paper from under his waistcoat, and laid it on the bed beside the "Complete Angler."

CHAPTER IV

SPOTTY

"WELL, now," observed Detective Thong, and, somehow or other, his voice sounded really cheerful, "let's see where we're at, Mr. Darcy. Have you looked over the stock all you want to?"

They were in a room in the rear of the jewelry store—the city and county detectives, the reporters and James Darcy—with Policeman Mulligan on guard near the cut glass and silver gleaming in the showcases. On guard near a dark red stain in the floor, scarcely dry—it was still soaking into the wood. The body of the murdered woman had been taken away, followed by a sigh of relief from James Darcy, who, try as he did, could not keep his eyes from seeking it.

"The stock is checked up as well as I can do it in a short time," replied the jewelry worker, who had spent some time going over the store under the watchful eyes of Carroll and Thong. "I'm not sure anything is taken. If there is, as I said, it can't be much. But I'll go over everything more carefully, checking up the books. That will take a few days, but I can do it while I'm here ar-

ranging for the funeral."

"Not here you can't do it," broke in Carroll, with a short laugh.

"Not here?" There was startled amazement in Darcy's question.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you won't be here. You'd better come with us. You'll have to, in fact. The captain'll want to have a talk with you, and I guess the prosecutor the same. How about it, Jim?" and he looked over at Haliday, from the Court House. He was examining the side door leading to the alley.

"Oh, sure! he'll have to be held—as a witness, anyhow," was the easy answer, and in the same breath he added: "Not a mark! Not a scratch on the place! It was an inside job all right!"

"Held? I'll have to be—held?" faltered Darcy.

"Of course," said Thong. "And, while you're at it, take a friend's advice, and keep your mouth shut."

"You mean anything I say might—might be used—against me?"

"Oh, I wouldn't put it that way exactly. That's moving picture stuff—theater business, you know. We don't go in for that—not me and Carroll. But don't talk too much. Of course you'll have to answer a lot of questions, and the easier you

do the better for you. But wait until they're asked. Maybe it's against my interests to say that, but I've sort of took a notion to you. Now you'd better get ready to leave."

"You mean lock the place up?"

"Oh, no, somebody'll have to stay here."

"Not me!" interrupted Mulligan. "I haven't had my breakfast. I was jest comin' in off dog-watch when I happened to see what was goin' on here—the crowd an' everythin'. I ain't goin' to stay!"

"Well, 'phone in then and get somebody," advised Carroll testily. "Somebody's got to be here until we can look around more."

"I'll stay for a while," said Haliday. "I'd like to look about a bit myself. I'll probably have to get the case ready for the prosecutor."

"Well, let's be going then," suggested Thong. "Shall I ring for the wagon?"

His partner shook his head after a look at Darcy.

"The trolley'll be all right for him," he said in a whisper. "We can get out the back way and avoid the crowd," for the street in front of the jewelry store was still thronged, in spite of the ever increasing rain. "As for King, he's asleep, and I guess we can put him to bed here. If we try to carry him out there'll be more of a push than there is now. Let him sleep it off," and he

glanced at a huddled figure in a corner chair.

"Who's asleep?" broke in the thick voice of the wastral. "Whash matter you fellers, anyhow? Man comes in get li'l preshent for his wife—wife sits up all night waitin'—she's 'titled to li'l preshent. Wheresh my gold knife, Darcy? I give it to you—have 'grave—Pearl's name—wheresh my knife?"

"You can have it pretty soon," promised Thong. "Look here, Harry, my boy. You're pretty drunk, for a fact, but do you happen to know where you were and what you did last night—and early this morning? Try to think—it may mean a lot to you!" and he spoke earnestly. "Where were you—what did you do?"

"What I did?" He blinked his eyes rapidly, to rid them of the water which poured forth in an effort to assuage their drink-inflamed condition, and regarded those about him with half-drunken gravity. "What I did? You want to know—what—what I did?"

"Yes. Where were you, and what did you do?" asked Carroll easily.

"Hu! Got drunk, thash what I did. Can't you see? I'm drunk yet, but I don't care! Ha! Had one swell time, thash what I did! One whale of a good time! It was *some* night—a wet night—believe me—a wet night—awful wet. Never had so mush fun—never! We got ole Doc Harrison

stewed to the gills—hones' we did—stewed like—like prunes—apricots! Ho! Thash what we did!"

"Guess he wasn't the only one," observed Carroll grimly. "Now, look here, King. You're pretty drunk yet, but maybe you can get this through your noodle. There's been some nasty business, and you may, or may not, know something about it, though I don't believe you do, for you're so pickled now that you must have been loading up ever since last week. But you've got to answer some questions—when you're able—and it's a question of holding you here or—taking you with us. How about it?"

"Look here!" snarled King, and his voice rang out with sudden energy. "Who you talkin' to?"

"Now take it easy, Harry," advised Thong. "We're talking to you, of course."

Harry King seemed to begin the process of sobering up. His eyes lost something of their bleary, misunderstanding look, and took on a dangerous glint. The detectives knew him for a spendthrift, who had been in more than one questionable escapade. He had a violent temper, drunk or sober, once it was roused, and it did not take much liquor to make him a veritable devil. Though after his first wild burst he became maudlin and silly. King came of a good family, but his relatives had cast him off after his midnight marriage to an actress of questionable morals, with whom it

was not a first offense, and he now lived, after his own peculiar fashion, on the income of an estate settled on him in his better days by an aunt. Now and then he managed to get larger advances than the stipulated sum from a rascally lawyer, who took a chance of reimbursing himself a hundred per cent. when Harry King should come to the end of his rope—a time which seemed not far off, if the present were any indication. He was to inherit the bulk of his fortune when he became thirty-five years of age. He was now thirty-three, but the pace he was going and keeping made his chances of living out the stated allotment seem meager.

"I'm talking to you, Harry, my boy," went on the detective, "and I advise you, for your own good, to keep a civil tongue in your head. If you don't, you may get into trouble. There's been a murder—"

"A murder!" King's voice was more certain now.

"Yes. You saw the body carried out—or are you still so drunk you can't remember? It was Mrs. Darcy—the lady who owned this jewelry store, you know. Now pull yourself together. You've got to come with us and explain a little about this knife of yours. She was stabbed with that."

"With my knife—that paper cutter dagger I

was giving as a present to—to my wife?" King's voice was sobering more now.

"That's the idea, Harry."

"But I brought that knife to Darcy to have him engrave it."

"That may be. It was used to cut the old lady, though, and laid back on Darcy's work-table. Come now—brace up, and tell us all you know about it."

"Oh, I—I can brace up all right. So the old lady's dead, is she? Killed—stabbed! Too bad! Many's the trinket I've bought of her for—for—well, some of the girls, you know," and he winked suggestively at the detectives. "Old lady Darcy's dead! Say, look here, boys!" he exclaimed with a sudden change of manner, as something seemed to penetrate to his sodden brain, "you—you don't for a minute think I did this—do you?" and he sat up straight for the first time.

"Never mind what we think," said Carroll. "We're not paid for telling it—like the reporters," and he grinned at Daley of the *Times*. "We want to get at the facts. Are you in condition to talk?"

"Not here!" interrupted Thong quickly, with a glance at the newspaper men, which they were quick to interpret. "Oh, it's all right, boys," went on the detective. "We'll let you in for anything that's going as soon as we can—you know that."

"Sure," agreed Daley. "But don't keep us waiting all day. The presses are like animals—they have to be fed, you know. First editions don't wait for gum-shoe men, even if they're of the first water. And I've got a city editor who has a temper like a bear with a sore nose in huckleberry time. So loosen up as soon as you can."

They took King and Darcy to police headquarters in a taxicab which King, with still half-drunken gravity, insisted on paying for.

Colonel Ashley—or Colonel Brentnall as he had registered at the hotel—having, by means of a more or less adroit bit of camouflage, obtained possession of the newspaper containing an account of the murder of Mrs. Darcy, and of the holding of her cousin and Harry King on suspicion, tossed the journal on the bed beside his well-worn copy of the "Complete Angler." Then, to demonstrate his complete mastery over himself, he picked up the book, never so much as glancing at the black headlines, and read:

". . . I have found it to be a real truth that the very sitting by the river's side is not only the quietest and fittest place for contemplation, but will invite the angler to it; . . ."

"I'm a fool!" exploded the colonel. "I came here to fish; and, first click of the reel, I go nosing around on the trail of a murder, when I vowed

I wouldn't even dream of a case. I won't either —that's flat! I'll get my rods in shape to go fishing to-morrow. It may clear. Then Shag and I—"

Slowly the book slipped from his hand. It fell on the bed with a soft thud, and a breeze from the partly opened window ruffled a page of the newspaper. The colonel, looking guiltily around the room, walked nearer to the bed, and then, as stealthily as though committing a theft, he picked up the *Times*. Softly he exclaimed:

"Gad! what's the use?"

A moment later, pulling his chair beneath an electric light, he began to read the account of the murder.

Pete Daley's story of the finding of the dead body of the owner of the jewelry store was a graphic bit of work. He described how Darcy, coming down in the gray dawn, had discovered the woman lying stark and cold, her head crushed and a stab wound in her side.

None of the details was lacking, though the gruesomeness was skilfully covered with some well-done descriptive writing. The wounds seemed to have been inflicted at the same time—one by the metal statue of a hunter found on the floor near the body, the other by a dagger-like paper cutter, admitted to be owned by Harry King, but which, with the blade blood-stained, was found

on the jewelry bench of her cousin James Darcy.

The solution of the murder mystery depended on the answers to two questions, the reporter pointed out. First, which wound killed Mrs. Darcy? Second, who inflicted either or both wounds?

There were ramifications from these beginnings —such as the motive for the crime; whether or not there had been a robbery; and, if so, by whom committed. Then, to get to the more personal problem, did either King or Darcy commit the murder, and, if so, why?

"Um," mused the colonel, reading the *Times* on the evening of the day the crime was discovered. "It may turn out to be a mystery after all, in spite of the two men who are held. Let's see now," and he went on with his perusal of the paper.

The autopsy had been performed, and Dr. Warren had said either wound might have caused death; for the skull was badly fractured, and vital organs had been pierced by the dagger, which the papers called it, though it really was a paper cutter of foreign make.

King and Darcy were not, as yet, formally arrested, being "detained," merely, at police headquarters as witnesses, though there was no question but that suspicion was cast on both. Under the law a formal charge must be made against them within twenty-four hours, and unless this

was done King's lawyer threatened to bring *habeas corpus* proceedings for his client.

"Oh, there'll be a charge made before then all right," said Thong easily, when the legal shyster had, with threatening finger under the detective's nose, made much of this point. "I'm not saying it will be against your man, Mr. Fussell, but there'll be a charge made all right."

It is needless to say that both suspected men protested they knew nothing about the killing. King was frank enough—sober now—to say he had been drunk all night—spending the hours with boon companions in a notorious resort, a statement which seemed capable enough of proof.

Darcy told over and over again how he had come downstairs to find his relative stretched on the floor of the shop, and, aside from that little restless period of the night, he had heard no disturbance. Sallie Page could tell nothing, the maid was out of the city, and none of the clerks knew more of what had happened than they were told.

Playing up Darcy's story, Daley and some of the other reporters speculated on whether or not a burglar might have entered the store, leaving no trace of his uncanny skill, and, in his wanderings about the place, have entered Darcy's room. He might even have attempted to chloroform the jewelry worker, it was suggested, and perhaps did, slightly. Then, descending to the store, the

intruder might have started to loot the safe when he was disturbed by Mrs. Darcy, who may have come down to see what the unusual noise was.

Such, at least, was a theory, and one several took stock in. At any rate Darcy, after having been aroused, by what he knew not, had gone to sleep again, only to awaken to hurry down to do the repair work on the watch of the East Indian—the watch that was found so uncannily ticking in the otherwise silent jewelry store, clasped in the hand of the dead woman. It was mentioned that Singa Phut was being kept under observation, though no suspicion attached to him.

Darcy had at first nervously, and then indignantly, protested his innocence, King continually doing the latter. Naturally there followed, even with the faint suspicions so far engendered, the question as to what the possible object for the crime could have been, presuming either man had been involved.

It was known that King was constantly in debt, in spite of his allowance and the more substantial advances he received from time to time. He had patronized the jewelry store, and he admitted owing Mrs. Darcy quite a large sum for a brooch he had purchased for his wife some time before. It was, of course, possible, that he had, in his drunken state, gone to the store to get the paper cutter, which some peculiar kink or twist in his drink-

inflamed brain had caused him to remember at an odd time. Or perhaps he had run short of money when playing cards, and have gone to Mrs. Darcy's store to borrow or see if he could not get something on which he might raise cash.

Harry King was known to have been gambling the night before, the game lasting until nearly morning, and at one stage, when King was "broke," he had excused himself, gone out into the night alone, and had come back well supplied with funds. Asked jokingly by his cronies where he had got the money, he had said "a lady" gave it to him. He resumed play, only to lose, and had staggered out into the gray dawn, which was the last his companions had seen of him. He next appeared at the jewelry store after the murder.

Sobered, King's explanation was that "a lady" had really given him the money, but who she was, or why she gave him funds at two o'clock in the morning, he would not say. He admitted calling at the jewelry store somewhere around eleven o'clock at night for the purpose of seeing if the engraving on the paper cutter had been finished. King was not so very drunk then, he said. He was just "starting in."

The store was closed, he said, but he added a bit of testimony that caused Colonel Ashley, and others, to think a bit.

King said that, though the front doors to the

store were locked, he, knowing the place well, had gone around to the side door in the alley, thinking that might not yet be fastened. He hoped, he said, to be able to get in and procure the present for his wife. But this door, too, was locked, though through the glass he could see a light in the rear room. And he could hear voices, which were raised louder than ordinary.

The voices, King added, were those of Mrs. Darcy and her counsin, James Darcy, and it was evident that a quarrel was in progress. Asked as to the nature of the dispute King had said he had heard mentioned several times the name "Amy." There was also something said about money and an "electric lathe."

Naturally there was an inquiry as to who "Amy" was, and what was meant by the electric lathe. Darcy answered with seeming frankness that the Amy in question was Miss Mason, daughter of Adrian Mason, wealthy stockman of Pompey, a village about ten miles from Colchester. Mr. Mason had what was often referred to as a "show place," with blooded horses and cattle, and he was quite a financial figure in Monroe county, of which Colchester was the county seat.

Besides this, Amy was well off in her own right, her uncle having left her a half interest in a valuable mine.

James Darcy and Amy Mason were engaged to

be married, though this fact was known to but few, and made quite a sensation when Darcy admitted it after his arrest. He and Amy had known each other since childhood, and when small had lived near each other.

Mr. Mason, in spite of his wealth, was a democratic man, and though he knew, and Amy also, that she might have married wealth and position, both were "passed up," to quote the stockman himself, in favor of a real love match. For that is what it was.

"He's a *man,* that's what James Darcy is!" Amy's father had said, when some one hinted that he had neither wealth nor family of which to boast. "He's a *man!* He's got all the family he needs. What's a family good for, anyhow, after you're grown up? As for money, I've got more than I need, and Amy's got a little nest-egg of her own. Besides, Darcy can earn his living, which is a hanged sight more than some of these dancing lizards can do if they were put to it."

It developed that the words over Amy which had occurred, just before the murder, between James Darcy and his cousin, had to do with the difference in the worldly prospects of the two young people. Mrs. Darcy had rather laughed at him, James said, for thinking of marrying a girl so much wealthier than he was.

"What did you tell her?" asked Carroll. "I mean your cousin."

"I told her I could support my wife decently well, if not in such state as that to which she was accustomed in her father's house. As for style, neither Miss Mason nor I care for it. And, if things go right, I may be able to bring her as much wealth as she has herself."

"How do you mean if things go right?" asked the detective.

"Well, if I can perfect the electric lathe I am trying to patent," was the answer.

"Oh, so that's what King heard about an electric lathe?"

"I suppose so. It's no great secret. I've been working on it for some time, but my cousin objected to my spending my time that way. She thought I should devote it all to her interests, even outside the shop. I told her I had my own future to look to, and we often had words about that. Last night's quarrel wasn't the first, though she was especially bitter over my work on the lathe. I have been giving it more time than usual because it is nearly finished, and I want to get it ready to show at a big Eastern jewelry convention."

"And what was the talk about money?"

"Well, Mrs. Darcy owed me about a thousand dollars. I had done some special work on making

necklaces for her customers, and she had promised, if they were pleased, to pay me extra for the exclusive designs I got up. The customers were pleased, and they paid her extra for the ornaments. So I demanded that she keep her promise, but she refused, pleading that many other customers owed her and times were hard. I needed that thousand dollars to help complete my lathe model, and—well, we had words over that, too."

"Then, do I understand," summed up Carroll, "that the night Mrs. Darcy was killed you had a quarrel with her over Miss Mason, and about the money and because you spent too much time working on your patent lathe?"

"Well, yes, though I don't admit I spent too much time, and I surely will claim she owed me that money. As for Miss Mason—I'd prefer to have her name left out," faltered the young jeweler.

"We can't always have what we want," said Thong, dryly. "Was the quarrel specially bitter?"

"Not any more so than others. I had to speak a little loud, for my cousin was getting a trifle deaf."

"And after the quarrel you went to bed?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't see your cousin again until—when?" and Carroll looked Darcy straight in the eyes.

"Not until after she was—dead."

"Um! I guess that's all now."

They let the young man go back to his room in police headquarters. It was not a cell—yet, though it would seem likely to come to that, for Thong observed to his partner as they went downstairs:

"Well, there's a motive all right."

"Three, if you like. But none of 'em hardly strong enough for murder."

"Oh, I don't know. I hear he has quite a temper—different from Harry King's, but enough, especially if he got riled about the old lady talking against his girl. You never can tell."

"No, that's so."

Left alone, James Darcy threw himself into a chair and looked blankly at the dull-painted wall.

"This is fierce!" he murmured. "It will be a terrible blow to Amy! I wonder—I wonder if she'll have anything to do with me after this? The shame of it—the disgrace! Oh, Amy! if I could only know!" and he reached out his hand as though to thrust them beyond the confines of the walls. He bowed his head in his arms and was silent and motionless a long time.

Up in his hotel room, Colonel Ashley read the story of the case as printed in the *Times*.

"This does begin to get interesting," he mused, as he finished reading the account. "There are

three possible motives in Darcy's case, and one in King's. And I've known murder to be done on slighter provocation. Darcy might have resented being called a fortune hunter, which, I suppose, is what the old lady meant, or he may have been stung to sudden passion by the holding back of the thousand dollars and the taunts about his lathe. Most inventors are crazy anyhow.

"As for King—if he was drunk enough, and wanted money—or thought he could get some diamonds—it might be—it might be. I wonder who his lady friend is? He daren't tell, I suppost, on account of his wife. I wonder——"

"Oh, what am I bothering about it for, anyhow? I came here to rest and fish, and I'm going to. I've resigned from detective work! There!" He tossed the paper behind the bed. "I'll not look at another issue. Now let's see how my rods are. I'm going to get an early start in the morning, if this infernal rain lets up. Blast that Shag! He's jammed a ferrule!" and, with blazing eyes, the colonel looked at one of the joints of his choicest rod. A brass connection had been bent.

"That's a shame! It'll never work that way—never! I've got to go out and see if I can't get it mended. Wonder if there's a decent sporting goods store in this part of town. I'll go out and have a look."

He made himself ready, taking the two parts of the fishing rod with him. Inquiry at the hotel desk supplied him with the information as to the location of the store, and the detective was soon out in the wet streets, breathing in deep of the damp air—for it was fresh and that was what the colonel liked.

Somehow or other the address of the jewelry store clung to his mind, and, almost unconsciously, he found himself heading in that direction.

"Well, I *am* a fool!" he murmured, as he passed the place, now ghostly with its one light in front of the safe. The police had taken charge, pending the arrival of a relative of Mrs. Darcy's. Inside, the cut glass and silver gleamed as of old, but on the floor, sunk deep in the grain of the wood now, was the spot of blood—fit to keep company with the red rubies in the locked safe.

"Quite a place," murmured the colonel, as he passed on toward the sporting goods store. "Quite a place! Oh, hang it! I must get it out of my mind!"

In spite of his rather exacting demands regarding a ferrule for his rod, he found what he wanted and, feeling quite satisfied now, as he noted that the weather showed some slight signs of clearing, the colonel started back for his hotel, walking slowly, for it was not yet late.

Just how it happened, not even Colonel Ashley, naturally the most interested person, could tell afterward. But as the detective was crossing a crowded street a big auto truck swung around a corner, and he found himself directly in its path as he stepped off the curb.

Active as he always kept himself, the old detective sprang back out of the way. But fate, in the person of a small boy, had just a little while before, dropped a banana skin on the streets. And the colonel stepped squarely on this peeling, as he tried to retreat.

There was a sudden sliding, an endeavor to retain his footing, and then Colonel Ashley fell prostrate, his fishing rod pieces spinning from his fingers. Down he went, and the truck thundered straight at him.

It was almost upon him, and the big, solid, front tires were about to crush him, in spite of the frantic efforts of the driver to swerve his machine to one side, when a slim figure dashed from the crowd on the sidewalk, and, with an indistinguishable cry, seized the colonel by the shoulders, fairly dragging him with a desperate burst of strength from the very path of death.

There were gasps of alarm and sighs of relief. The driver of the truck swore audibly, but it was more a prayer than an oath. The colonel, grimy and muddy, was set on his feet by his

rescuer, and several men gathered about. The colonel was a bit dazed, but not so much so that he could not hear several murmur:

"He saved his life all right!"

Recovering his breath and the control of his nerves at about the same time, the detective, his voice trembling in spite of himself, turned to the man who had dragged him from almost under the big wheels and said:

"Sir, you did save my life! You saved me from a horrible death, and saying so doesn't begin to thank you or tell you what I mean. If you'll have the goodness, sir, to call a taxi for me, and come with me to my hotel, I can then——"

The colonel came to a halting and sudden pause as he saw the face of the slim little man who had saved him—a face covered with freckles, which were splotched over the cheeks, the turned-up nose, and reaching back to the wide-set ears.

"Spotty!—Spotty Morgan!" gasped the detective, as he recognized a New York gunman, who was supposed to have more than one killing to his credit, or debit, according as you happen to reckon.

"Spotty Morgan! You—you—here!" gasped the detective.

The rescuer, who had been grinning cheerfully, went white under his copper freckles.

"My gawd! It's you! Colonel—"

Further words were stopped by the detective's hand placed softly, quickly, and so dexterously as hardly to be seen by those in the crowd, over the mouth of the speaker.

"No names—here!" whispered the colonel in the big ear of the man who had saved him from death.

The slim little man gave a wiggle like an eel, and would have darted away through the crowd, but there was a vice-like grip on his shoulder that he knew but too well.

"Spotty, my name's Brentnall for the present," said the colonel, with a grim smile. "And you'd better come with me. How about it?"

Spotty Morgan hesitated a moment, nodded silently, and then, arm in arm with the man whom he had pulled from the path of the big truck, went down the street, the mist and rain swallowing them up.

CHAPTER V

AMY'S APPEAL

TINKLING glasses formed a friendly rampart between Colonel Ashley and Spotty Morgan. Spotty looked narrowly and shrewdly at the detective.

"I didn't expect to see you here," remarked the gunman, speaking out of the side of his mouth, with scarcely a motion of his lips—a habit acquired through long practice in preventing prison keepers from finding out that he was disobeying the rules regarding silence. "Not for a minute did I expect to run across you here, Colonel As——"

"Not that name, Spotty, *if* you please," and the fisherman-detective smiled in easy fashion. "You know my little habits in that regard. I'm known here as Brentnall, and, if it's all the same to you, just use that. As for you, if Spotty——"

"Oh, that suits me as well as any other. I can change whenever I like." Spotty raised a glass to his lips, and, with a murmured "here's how," let the contents slide down his always-parched throat.

"That's so, Spotty. Well, I didn't expect to see *you* here, I give you my word. When did you leave New York?"

"Well, I come away——"

"Hold on!" interrupted the colonel. "Don't answer. I shouldn't have asked. I forgot you saved my life just now. Gad! it isn't the first time I've nearly passed over, but—not in that way!" and he reached for his glass to conceal the shudder that passed over him as he thought of the rumbling wheels of the thundering truck.

"Well, Colonel, I——"

"Never mind, Spotty. Perhaps the less you talk the better off you'll be. Does anybody in town know you're here?"

"Well, my picture——"

"Yes, it is probably down at headquarters. But they're too busy to look for it now. But they may—later. So far you haven't been recognized then?"

"Only by you, and it'd take a pretty clever guy——"

"No compliments, Spotty. We've gotten over that. You disguised yourself very well, but the freckles show through."

"Yes, damn 'em!" heartily exploded the gunman. "I *can't* cover 'em up. I've tried everything, but I guess I'll have to go togged up like a colored man to fool the other bulls. As for you, Colonel——"

"There you go again! Cut it out! This is business."

"Yes, good business for you, but bad for me. I didn't think you'd get after me so soon, Colonel!"

"I'm not after you, Spotty."

The detective spoke quietly, but the effect on the man sitting across the table from him, in one of the less conspicuous cafes in Colchester, had the effect of a shout.

"Not after me? You *ain't?*" and Spotty drew away from the array of glasses and bottles so suddenly that he overturned a tumbler with its tinkling chunk of ice. "Not after me, Colonel?"

"No, I came here for a quiet bit of fishing, and I just stumbled on this case against my will. I'm not even working on it, and I'm not going to. Nobody knows I'm in town except my man Shag —and you. I know I can depend on Shag, and as for you——"

"I'm with you till the cows come to roost, Colonel. I'm strong fer you! I kin forget I ever saw you."

"That's good. I thought you'd be that way. So, as no one knows I'm in town (the colonel knew nothing of what Shag had said to the newsboy), I can keep under cover and have my fishing as I like it—quiet. I don't intend any one shall know I'm here, either.

"Now, Spotty, I'm a plain-spoken man when there's occasion for it, and this is one of those times, I guess. You saved my life just now. I know that. Of course I realize I might just have been badly hurt, and perhaps have lingered on in a hospital for some years—but that would be worse than death. I consider that you saved my life. I couldn't have moved out of the way of that truck any more than I could have flown. I realize it more and more. You did me the biggest service one man can do another, and I'm not going to forget it, Spotty."

"No, I guess remembering is your long suit, Colonel."

"Well, that's all in a day's work. I didn't forget you, Spotty. Now, as I said, you saved my life. I believe in turning the tables, and though I can't do for you what you did for me, maybe I can help in a way."

"You kin gamble on that, Colonel!"

"Listen to me, Spotty," and the detective leaned forward and spoke in a low, tense voice. "Just now, as I say, I'm not in this case. Not being a public official, I'm not bound to use what knowledge or suspicions I have regarding this matter, and I'm not particularly interested—as yet. So I'm going to give you a chance, just as you gave me mine now. It isn't exactly the same, for maybe you wouldn't lose your life. You've been

devilishly lucky, and gotten through more narrow places than I'd ever give you credit for.

"So it may seem that I'm not quite squaring the account, but it's all I can do—now. I'm going to give you your chance. I'm not going to ask you any questions. You know what you know and I know what I know. Now, Spotty, streak it out of town as fast as a train can take you, and—*don't come back!*"

Spotty Morgan made little wet rings on the table with his empty glass. A waiter, hovering near by, caught the glint of his eye and brought the liquor. Then Spotty, after a libation, spoke.

"Colonel," he said slowly, "most of what you has been spielin' is like the lawyer guys git off in court. I don't quite tumble, but I take it you mean you're goin' t' let me go."

"That's it, Spotty! I'm going to let you go this time!"

"No double crossin'?"

"You know me better than that! I'll give you twenty-four hours to get out of town. After that I may happen to know more than I know now, and it would be my duty—whether I'm officially on the case or not—to arrest you.

"But now you're free. It's your life and liberty for mine—maybe not quite an even exchange, since you'd have more than even chances if it came to a trial, I suppose. But it's the best I

can do. I'm giving you this chance. I'd be a dirty dog if I didn't. But remember this, Spotty! I give you only one chance, just as you gave me—just as you took one and saved me. If I see you again, and this thing hangs over you, I may have to pull you up."

"All right, Colonel. That's a square deal. But don't worry. You won't see me if I see you first. I didn't dream you'd be after me so soon for the job I only done last night. I'd oughter cleared out, but I was waitin' for a pal, an—Oh, well, it was just like you to come around early."

"Man, don't you understand? I'm not after you! I didn't for an instant think you had a hand in it until just now. And I'm not admitting, even yet, that you did have. I haven't done a tap of work on the case, and I'm not going to. My advise to you is to get out of town before I may get into this thing against my will. Skip, Spotty! It's the only way I can pay my debt to you!"

The colonel made as though to hold out his hand to the freckle-faced man opposite him, and then changed the motion of his arm and picked up his glass.

"Skip, Spotty!" he murmured again.

"All right, Colonel, I will! I know when the goin's good. So long. And—thanks!"

Spotty, still talking through the corner of his

mouth, gave a quick glance around the room and slid out of a side door like an eel, disappearing into the rain and mist.

For some little time the colonel sat before the glasses, in which the cracked ice was rapidly melting. He, too, made little rings of water on the table.

"I wonder—" he mused, "I wonder if I did right."

His hand sought his pocket, and came out empty.

"I guess I must have left it on the bed," he murmured. "But I can remember it."

Then, as though reading from the little green book, he recited:

"But if the old salmon gets to the sea. . . and he recovers his strength, and comes next summer to the same river, if it be possible. . ."

"Spotty is a veritable salmon," mused the colonel, "even if he is speckled like a trout. I wonder, if he gets into the sea of New York, if I'll ever be able to land him?

"Well, he gave me my life, and I just *had* to give him a chance for his. It was all I could do. Now to fish and forget everything!"

It was a fair morning in April, with the sun just right, with the "wind in the west when the fish bite best," and Colonel Robert Lee Ashley, with the faithful Shag to carry his rods, creel

and a lunch basket, sallied forth from his hotel for a day beside a no-very-distant stream, the virtues of which he had heard were most alluring as regarded trout.

"Shag!" exclaimed the colonel, when they were tramping through a field near the river, having reached that vantage point by a most prosaic trolley car, "this is a beautiful day!"

"It suah am, sah!"

"And I'm going to catch some fine fish!"

"I suah does hope so, Colonel!"

"All right then! Now don't say another word until I speak to you. We'll be there pretty soon, and if there's one thing more than another that I hate, it's to have some one talking when I'm fishing."

"Yes, sah, Colonel!"

"Um! Well, see that you mind!"

Selecting with care a fly from his numerous collection, and hoping the appetites of the fish would incline them to consider it favorably that morning, Colonel Ashley proceeded to make his casts, standing not far from a bent, gnarled and twisted elm tree, that overhung the bank of the stream where the current had cut into the soil, making a deep eddy, in which a lazy trout might choose to lie in wait for some choice morsel.

Lightly as a falling feather, the fisherman let his fly come to rest on the sun-lit water, and,

hardly had it sent the first, few faint ripples circling toward shore than there was a shrill song of the reel, and the rod became a bent bow.

"By the bones of Sir Izaak!" cried the colonel, "I've hooked one, Shag!"

"De Lord be praised! So yo' has, Colonel!" cried the negro.

"Shut up!" ordered the colonel, who was beginning to play his fish. "Did I tell you to speak?"

But Shag only laughed. He knew his master.

After ten minutes of skilful work, during which time the trout nearly got away by shooting under a submerged log like an undersea boat diving beneath a battle cruiser, the colonel landed his fish, dropping it, panting, on the green grass. Then he looked up at Shag and remarked:

"Didn't I tell you this was a perfectly beautiful day?"

"Yo' suah did, Colonel," was the chuckling answer. "Yo' suah did!"

And so much at peace with himself and all the world was Colonel Robert Lee Ashley just then that, when the crackling of the underbrush behind him, a moment later, gave notice that some one was approaching, there was even a smile on his face, though, usually, he could not bear to be intruded upon when fishing.

Rather idly the colonel, having mercifully killed

his fish by a blow on top of the head and slipped it into the grass-lined creel, looked up to see approaching a young lady and a tall and somewhat lanky boy. There was some thing vaguely familiar about the boy, though the fisherman did not tax his mind with remembering, then, where or when he had seen him before.

"There he is," went the words of the boy, as he and the young woman came in sight of the colonel and Shag—but it was at the detective the lad pointed. "There he is!"

The girl rushed impulsively forward, and, as she held out her hands in a voiceless appeal, there was worry and anguish depicted on her face.

"Are you Colonel Brentnall?" she asked.

The colonel was sufficiently familiar with his alias not to betray surprise when it was used.

"I am," he said, and the peaceful, joyous look that had come into his eyes when he had landed his fish gave way to a hard and professional stare.

"Oh, Colonel Brentnall! I've come to ask you to help me—help him! You will, won't you? Don't say you won't!"

The girl's face, her blue eyes, the outstretched hands, the very poise of her lithe, young body voiced the appeal.

"My dear young lady," began the colonel. But she interrupted with:

"You're the detective, aren't you?"

"Well—er—I—Say rather *a* detective, for there are many, and I am only one."

"But you are the one from New York?"

"I am though I don't know how you guessed it. I am not here professionally, though—in fact, I've practically retired—and I would much prefer——"

"But you wouldn't refuse to help any one who needed it, would you? You wouldn't, I'm sure!" and the girl smiled through the tears in her blue eyes.

"Oh, of course, as a matter of humanity, I would not refuse to help any one. But, professionally—well, really, I'm not here in my detective role. I really can not consider anything at this time. I don't want to seem harsh, or impolite, but I can't——"

"Not even for double your usual fee? Listen! I am prepared to pay well for anything you can do for me—and him. My father is well off. I have money in my own right. I'd spend the last dollar of that. And dad said, when I told him where I was going—Dad said he'd do the same. We both believe Jimmie is innocent, and we want to prove it to everybody as soon as we can. That's why I came right on to see you. I couldn't wait! Oh, perhaps I did wrong, coming this way—I'm sorry if I've spoiled your fishing.

But this is such—such a *big* thing—it means so much to him—to me! I—I——"

She faltered, looking from Shag to the colonel and then to the sympathetic colored man again, for on his face was a look of pity.

"How did you know I was here?" asked Colonel Ashley.

"I went to your hotel. The clerk told me you had come to this stream. It's the only good one for trout around here besides the one on my father's farm."

"Has your father a trout stream?" and the eyes of the colonel took on a kindly gleam.

"He has, and it's well stocked. But please, won't you help me? You are the only one who can!"

"I'm not sure of that, my dear young lady. And, really, I hardly understand what it's all about. You say the hotel clerk told you I was here. I can understand that, for I asked him the best way to reach this place. But how did you know I was a detective and stopping at the Adams House?"

"He told me!" She pointed to the lanky youth.

The colonel and Shag turned their eyes on him. Shag gave a start of surprise. The colonel began to leaf over the brain tablets of his memory system. He was beginning to place the lad.

"Mah good land of massy!" ejaculated the

negro. "It's de train newsboy whut yo' give a dollar to las' night, Colonel!"

"The one who wanted to sell me a detective story?"

"I'm him, Colonel Brentnall," answered the lad, a smile of triumph lighting up his face. "Your man told me who you was, and I heard you tell the taxi man where to drive you. I didn't think anything more about it until I read about the murder."

"The murder!" exclaimed the colonel. Somehow that seemed to follow him as a Nemesis.

"Yes—old Mrs. Darcy—the jewelry store lady," went on the boy. "This young lady," and he nodded toward his companion, "when I told her——"

"Perhaps you had better let me explain, Tom," broke in the girl. "You see it's this way," she went on, addressing the colonel. "This boy is Tom Tracy. He sells papers on the express. He was once a jockey for my father, but he got hurt —stiff arm—and we had to get him something else to do. Dad always looks out for his boys, and so Tom went on the road."

"I had to do *something* that had motion in it," Tom explained in an aside.

"Yes, it was as near to horseback riding as he could come," said the girl, and she smiled, though the grief did not leave her blue eyes. "Well, as

he has told you, he heard who you were, Colonel, from your man. Then when he read about the murder, and found how—how close home it came to *me,* he hurried out to our place and said I should engage you to help——"

"He's the biggest detective in New York!" broke in Tom. "And that's what we need—a big New York detective!"

"But what's it all about?" asked the colonel. "This is talking in riddles, though I begin to see a little——"

"I beg your pardon," said the girl. "I should have told you who I am. My name is Amy Mason, and——"

"Ah! You are engaged to be married to James Darcy, who is—er—detained as a—er—as a *witness* in the murder of his cousin?"

"I am," and she seemed to glory in it. "As soon as I heard what had happened—to him—I wanted to help. They would not let me see Jimmie at police headquarters, but I sent word that dad and I were going to work for him every minute."

"That must have cheered him."

"I hope it did. But I want to do more than that. I want to help him! I want to get the best detective in the country to work on the case and prove that Jimmie didn't do this—this terrible thing of which he is accused."

"He isn't exactly *accused* yet, as I understand it, Miss Mason."

"Oh, well, it's just as bad. He is suspected. Why, Jimmie wouldn't have caused Mrs. Darcy a moment of pain, to say nothing of striking her—killing her! Oh, it's horrible—horrible!" and she covered her face with her hands.

"I don't quite understand," began the colonel, "why you came to me, or how——"

"I told her it was the only thing to do," broke in the newsboy. "Soon as I read about Carroll and Thong being on the case I knew it would take a fly one to put anything over on them. I tried on the train to sell you a detective book, not knowing who you was. You treated me white, and when I heard Miss Mason was in trouble—or her friend was—I said to myself right away that you was the one to fix things. I went out to her farm last night and she was all broke up."

"It was a terrible shock to me when I heard Jimmie was under arrest," said the girl. "I didn't know what to do. Tom, here, proposed coming to see you, and when dad heard who you were, though we knew nothing of you, he said the same thing. He told me I could have all the money I wanted, and I have some of my own if his isn't enough."

"It isn't always a question of money," began the colonel, gently.

"I know!" broke in Amy. "But if I add the inducement of all the trout fishing——"

"You are strongly tempting me, my dear young lady. But finish your story."

"Well, there isn't much more to tell. Tom suggested that I come to see you and ask you to take Mr. Darcy's case—to prove that he had no hand in the murder—for I'm sure he did not.

"Tom stayed at our house at Pompey all night. I wanted to come to your hotel at once, but the storm got too bad, so I waited until this morning, and then we motored in. We found you had gone fishing, and we followed you here. It was, perhaps, not just the thing to do. But I was so anxious! I want to tell Jimmie that something is being done for him. You will help us, won't you?" and again she held out her hands appealingly.

"I don't know anything about police or detectives," she went on, "but I'm sure there must be some way of proving that my—that Jimmie had no hand in this. Some terrible thief—a burglar—must have killed Mrs. Darcy. Oh, Colonel Brentnall, you will help us—won't you?"

She stood there, a beautiful and pathetic picture. The wind sighed through the trees and the murmur of the rippling water filled the air.

"Please!" she whispered. Her hands seemed to waver. Her body swayed

"Shag, you black rascal!" cried the colonel. "The lady's going to faint! Catch her!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel!"

"No! Stand back! I'll attend to her myself! I've given up detective work, but——"

And a moment later Amy Mason sank limply into the colonel's arms.

CHAPTER VI

GRAFTON'S SEARCH

THE funeral of Mrs. Darcy had been held, attended, as might be supposed, by a large throng of the merely curious, as well as by some of her distant kinsfolk, for she had few near ones. One of the relatives was summoned to take charge of the store and her other business affairs, for, a formal charge of murder having been made against him, James Darcy was not permitted to attend the final services, nor have anything more to do with the jewelry establishment. Harry King, now painfully sober, was likewise held in jail, bail being fixed, because of his uncertain character, at such a high figure that he could not secure it.

The police had been busy, the prosecutor's detectives also, but, so far, the arrest of Darcy and King had been the only ones made. Singa Phut, whose watch was found clasped in the dead woman's hand, had been closely questioned, but had established a perfect *alibi*.

And the testimony as to this came, not from persons of his own nationality, but from business

men and others, whose words could not be doubted. So, in the opinion of the authorities, he was not worth considering further. He admitted having left his watch at the shop to be repaired, some days before the murder, and had not called at the store since, except on the morning of the crime, and some time after its discovery, to get his timepiece, which, of course, he was not then allowed to take.

Darcy had been formally charged with the crime of murder by the police captain in whose precinct the happening occurred, and, no bail being permissible in murder cases, he must, perforce, remain locked up until his indictment and trial. He was transferred from the witness room of police headquarters, the day of the funeral, to the less pleasant jail, and put in a cell, as were the other unfortunates of that institution.

Jay Kenneth, Darcy's lawyer, a young member of the bar, but enthusiastic and a hard worker, had made a formal entry of a plea of not guilty for his client, when the latter had been arraigned before the upper court, and had asked for a speedy trial.

And so, after the first few days of wonder and surmise and of speculation as to whether Darcy or King might have committed the crime, or perhaps some desperate burglar, the Darcy case was crowded off the front page of the newspapers to

give way to items of more or less local interest in Colchester.

Up and down the narrow cell paced James Darcy. His head was bowed, but at times he raised it to look out through the barred door. All his eyes encountered, though, was the white-washed wall opposite him—a bare, white and glaring wall that made his eyes burn—a wall that seemed to shut out hope itself—as if it were not enough that it had been at the very bottom of Pandora's box.

Up and down, down and up, now pausing to take his hands from their strained position clasped behind his back that they might grasp the cold bars of his cell door—slim white hands that had set many a gleaming jewel in burnished gold or cold, glittering platinum, that it might grace the person of some sweet woman. And now those white fingers grasped cold steel, and a keeper, passing up and down on his half-hourly rounds, wondered, grimly, if they had been stained with the blood of Mrs. Darcy.

But though the wall blocked his vision, Darcy saw through and beyond it. He saw the glittering showcases in the store, with their arrays of cut glass and silver. He saw the gleaming jewels in the safe.

He saw, too, the stained and keen paper knife which the drunken King had swaggered in to

claim that gray morning. He saw the red spot on the floor—the spot which, even now, in spite of many scrubbings, was visible to the men and women who, now that the store was opened for business again, walked in to select some piece of gold or silver, some jewel for their own adornment or that of another.

And the gray-haired woman, whose pride it had been to display her beautiful wares to her friends and others, was all alone in a grave far up on the hill—a hill which looked down on Colchester—which looked down on the very store itself.

All of this James Darcy saw, and more.

There was a brisker step along the flagged corridor in front of the cells of "murderers' row." Half a dozen men, and one woman, against whom such a charge had been made—Darcy among them—looked up with an interest they had not shown before. Did it mean a visitor for any of them? Did it mean their lawyer was coming to bid them cheer up, or to tell them it looked black for their chances?

The step was that of the keeper of the outer gate—the larger and more massively barred gate which gave entrance to the anteroom where, on visiting days, even those charged with the highest degree of crime were permitted to see their friends, relatives or counsel.

"Some one to see you, Darcy!" called the keeper.

There was the clang of the lock mechanism, and the door swung open. Darcy's eyes brightened, those of the others in the same tier of cells with him which, for the moment had lighted up, grew dull again.

"My lawyer?" asked Darcy.

"Yes. And there's a lady with him."

"A lady?"

"Yes. Come on!"

Darcy caught sight of Amy before she saw him, for he approached from behind a line of other prisoners exercising in the space before their cells. She was with Kenneth.

"Amy!" exclaimed Darcy, as he was allowed to step out into the anteroom, closely followed by a keeper, while a detective from the prosecutor's office stood near. "Amy!" and his eyes glowed.

"Jimmie boy!"

To the eternal credit of the keeper and the detective be it said that, at this moment, they found something of great interest in the calendar that hung on the opposite wall, while Kenneth talked earnestly with the warden. And the prisoners beyond the barred door were too busy with their exercise to look around.

"Jimmie boy!"

"Amy! You—you don't——"

"Of course I don't! Didn't I tell you so in my letter?"

"Yes, but——"

"Now, that isn't the way to talk, especially when I have come to bring you good news."

"Good news? You mean your father——"

"Oh, it isn't about dad! I told you he was as firm a believer in you as I am—that he said he'd 'go the limit,' if you know what that means, to get you free. Jimmie boy, when dad likes a person he likes him!"

"I hope his daughter does the same."

"Don't you *know*—Jimmie boy?"

The warden, the detective, the keeper and the lawyer—all now seemed interested in that prosaic calendar.

Amy had had but little chance to speak to Darcy since his arrest. In police headquarters he was kept in seclusion except as to his lawyer, and events had followed one another so rapidly that there had been no other opportunity until now, though the girl had sent him a hasty note in which she said she knew he was innocent and that everything possible was being done for him.

"And now, Jimmie, for the good news. I have engaged the best detective in this country for you," and she beckoned to the lawyer to come forward.

"The best detective?"

"Yes. You need one as well as a lawyer. They're going to work together—aren't you, Mr. Kenneth?"

"Indeed a detective can help us best at this stage of the game, I think, Mr. Darcy," was the lawyer's answer. "I can look after the court proceedings, when it comes time for them, but what we want most is evidence tending to show that some one else, and not you, committed this crime."

"As, most assuredly was the case!" and for the first time in days Darcy's voice had its old ring and vigor in it.

"Of course, Jimmie boy," murmured Amy. "Now let me tell you all about it. They say I can't stay very long, so I'll have to talk fast, and you must listen—mostly. Now what do you say to—Colonel Ashley?" and Amy looked triumphantly at her lover.

"Colonel Ashley?"

"Yes. As the detective who is going to help prove you innocent by discovering the real—ugh! I hate to say it—*murderer?*"

"Why, Colonel Ashley is one of the greatest detectives in the United States—at least, he used to be. He must be pretty old now."

"I know he is—but not too old to take hold. Now when he comes—"

"But, Amy, my dear! You can't get *him!* Why, he's not only one of the highest-priced detectives in the country, but he's retired I've read, and I doubt if he'd take a case——"

"He's going to take *your* case, Jimmie boy!" and Amy smiled.

"But how—how——"

"I think we'll have to give Miss Mason credit for a whole lot in this matter," broke in Kenneth. "She surprised me when she told me. And I want to say that when the colonel gets going we'll have you out of here in short order, Mr. Darcy!"

"But I don't understand——"

"That's what I came to tell you about, Jimmie boy! Now just keep quiet and listen!"

Thereupon Amy went on to relate all that had happened when she sought out the fisherman at the trout brook—how she had been cared for by him and Shag after her faint, and how, after some persuasion, the great detective had agreed to take up the matter of seeking out the real murderer of Mrs. Darcy.

"He came here under a different name," Amy continued, "for he did not want to be bothered with work. But Tom—he's the little jockey dad got a place for as train-boy—met him on the express and learned that the colonel was the great detective. Then Tom came and told me when he read of your—of your——"

"Oh, say *arrest,* Amy! I'm getting hardened to it by now."

"Well, then, your—arrest. I hate the word! Tom came and told me and said we must get Colonel Brentnall at once. That was the name

he used, but, now he has consented to take your case, he's Colonel Ashley again."

"And what am I to do, Amy?"

"Just what he tells you—nothing more or less. Tell him everything from the beginning to the end. All about your quarrel with Mrs. Darcy —I read in the papers you had one. Was that so?"

"Yes, and, I am sorry to say, it was partly about you."

"I don't mind, Jimmie boy. I know it couldn't have been very bad."

"It wasn't. She—well, she sneered at you for thinking of marrying me—a poor man—and——"

"As if money counted, Jimmie boy!" cried the girl fondly.

"I know. But it angered me, I admit. However, nothing more came of that. And as for her finding fault with me about my electric lathe, and about the money she owed me—well, that was a sort of periodic disagreement."

"Tell the colonel all about it."

"I will. And are you sure your father——"

"Dad's with me in this—with me and you! He'd have come to see you himself to-day, but I said I wanted to see you first. He'll be along soon. So you see, Jimmie boy, things aren't so bad as they seem, though I hate it that you should be in this horrible place."

"It is horrible, Amy. But now that I know you—you haven't given me up——"

"Don't *dare* say such a thing, Jimmie boy!" and the girl's eyes sparkled with a new light.

"Well, it won't be so horrible from now on. And is the colonel really going to take my case?"

"Really and truly! I told him he *had* to if he wanted to fish in dad's trout stream," and she laughed—a strange sound in that gloomy place.

Then they talked about many things. James Darcy had read much of Colonel Ashley's achievements in detective work, and the very magic of the name was enough to give a prisoner courage.

Soon it was time to leave, after Kenneth had conferred briefly with his client. The prisoner went back to his little cell with a happier look on his face than when he had left it.

As for Colonel Ashley, after he had revived Amy from her faint at the stream, he had told Shag to take apart the fishing rod.

"For, Shag, I guess I won't be needing it for a week or so," said the old detective, and there was a mingling of two emotions in his voice.

"Uh, ah!" murmured Shag, as, carefully, he put away the delicate rod and reel. "It's either fishin' or detectin' wif de colonel, dat's whut it suah am! Fishin' or detectin'! De colonel ain't one dat kin carry watermelons on bof shoulders!"

Returning from his fishing trip with the one, lone specimen, Colonel Ashley, having escorted Amy Mason to her automobile, went back to the hotel with Shag.

"I might have known how it would be, Shag," he remarked, almost mournfully. "I might have known I'd run into something when I came here for rest."

"Dat's right, Colonel. Yo' suah might! But who does yo' s'pect did dish yeah killin'?"

"It's too early yet to tell, Shag, and you know I don't make any predictions. I want to get a few more facts."

This the colonel proceeded to do. First having had himself accredited as working in Darcy's behalf by being introduced by the accused man's lawyer, the detective paid a visit to the jewelry store. The place was in charge of Thomas Kettridge, a half uncle to Mrs. Darcy.

The place had been opened for business again after the funeral, and customers came in, carefully avoiding the place where a dark stain could be seen in the floor—a stain made all the more conspicuous because of the light-colored boards about it.

The colonel made a careful examination of the premises, and had described to him the exact position of the body, being told all that went on that tragic morning.

It was after this, and following some busy hours spent in various parts of the city, that the detective sent to one of his trusted men in New York this telegram:

"Spotty Morgan's vacation is over. Have him spend a few days with you until I can invite him to my country place."

"I hate to do it, after what he did for me," mused the colonel with a sigh. "But business is business from now on. I'm officially in the case, and I wasn't before."

Having sent the somewhat cryptic message, the old detective sat in his room and took from his pocket a little green book.

"Well, old friend, I guess I'm not going to have much use for you from now on," he remarked dolefully. He glanced to where his rods and flies were gathering dust. "Nor you, either," he went on. "Now for a last glimpse——"

He opened the book and read:

"And now I shall tell you that the fishing with a natural fly is excellent and affords much pleasure."

"It won't do!" ejaculated the colonel as he closed the book and threw it aside.

One matter puzzled the colonel as well as the other detectives. There was no sign of the jew-

elery store having been entered from the outside, so that if a stranger had come in he must have done so when the doors were unlocked or made a false key, or else he had forced a passage so skilfully as to leave not a sign.

Of course this was possible, and it added to the inference of some that a burglar, used to such work, had entered the place, and, being detected at work by Mrs. Darcy, had killed her.

However, there was not so much as a cuff button missing, as far as could be learned after the contents of the store had been checked up, though of course an intruder might have been frightened off before he had taken anything.

Many of Darcy's friends could not help but admit that appearances were against him. He and his cousin had quarreled, somewhat bitterly, over money, and about his refusal to give up work on his electric lathe. There was also King's testimony about words over Amy, though Darcy contended that this talk was nothing more than his relative had indulged in before regarding the unsuitableness of the match. Darcy admitted resenting his cousin's imputation.

All this Colonel Ashley had taken into consideration before he sent the telegram. And, having done that, and having had a talk with Darcy at the jail, as well as a consultation with the lawyer, having visited Harry King and seen Singa

Phut, the detective paid another visit to the jewelry shop.

"And what can I do for you to-day, Colonel?" asked Mr. Kettridge, who, by this time, had the business running smoothly again. "Have you gotten any further into the mystery?"

"Not as far as I would like to get. I'm going to browse about here a bit, if you have no objection."

"Not at all. Make yourself at home."

"I will. First, I'd like to see that statue—the one of the hunter, with which it is supposed Mrs. Darcy was struck."

"Oh, that is at the prosecutor's office—that and Harry King's unfortunate paper knife."

"So they are. I had forgotten. Well, I'll look about a bit then. Don't pay any attention to me. I'll go and come as I please."

And so he went, seemingly rather idly about the jewelry store, looking and listening.

It was not until the third day of his surveillance, during which passage of time he had waited anxiously for a message from New York without getting it, that the colonel felt his patience was about to be rewarded. The detective was a fisherman in more ways than one.

Trade had been rather brisk in the shop—possibly because of gruesome curiosity—when, one afternoon, a man entered who seemed to know

several in the place. Yet he did not talk with them, beyond a mere passing of the time of day, but went about nervously from showcase to counter and repeated the journey. When Mr. Kettridge asked him at what he desired to look he replied there was nothing in particular—that he had in mind a gift, but, as yet, had decided on nothing.

"Look about as you please," was the courteous invitation he received, and the man availed himself of it.

Of medium build, yet with the appearance of having lived more in the open than does the average man, his face had, yet, a strange pallor not in keeping with his robust frame. And his manner was certainly nervous.

"Now what," mused the colonel to himself, "is *he* fishing for?"

That day there was more than the usual number of people in the store—many of them undoubtedly curiosity seekers, who came into price certain articles ostensibly, but who, really, wanted to stare at the place where the bloodstains had been scrubbed away.

And at this spot the robust man stared longer than did some of the others, the colonel thought. Did he hope that some spirit of the poor, murdered woman might still be lingering there, to whisper to him what he sought to learn?

"Who is that man?" asked Colonel Ashley of Mr. Kettridge, who had often come to the shop during the holiday seasons to help Mrs. Darcey.

"Oh, that's Mr. Grafton."

"Mr. Grafton? Who is he?"

"Aaron Grafton, one of Colchester's best and wealthiest citizens. He owns the Emporium."

"That big department store?"

"Yes. He has built it up from a small establishment. I have known him a number of years, and he knew Mrs. Darcy quite well. He often has purchased diamonds here, though he is not married, and I don't know that he is engaged—rather late in life, too, for him to be considering that."

"Oh, well, you never can tell," and the colonel smiled.

"So that is Aaron Grafton!" he mused. "Well, Mr. Grafton, in spite of the well known reputation you bear, I think you will stand a little watching. I must not neglect the smallest clew in a case like this. Yes, decidedly, I think you will bear watching!"

For at that moment the merchant, after another round of the store, seeking for something it seemed he could not find, turned and hurried out, a much-troubled look on his face. Colonel Ashley followed.

CHAPTER VII

THE COLONEL IS SURPRISED

"THIS," said Colonel Ashley to himself, as he glided rapidly along the street, "is very much like old times—very much! I never expected to do any shadowing again. What's that Walton says about man proposing and Providence disposing? Or was it Walton? I must look it up. Meanwhile—"

Continuing his musing, and with a satisfied smile on his face, a smile that might indicate that the colonel was not so very much averse to giving over his fishing for the time being to take up his profession once more, he followed Aaron Grafton as the merchant left the jewelry store.

"I wonder," mused the colonel, "what his object was in coming to the Darcy place, and nosing around as he did? There must have been *some* object. A man such as he is doesn't do things like that for fun. And it wasn't mere curiosity, either. If it was, he'd have been at the place before, when the evidences of the crime were there to be stared at by those who care for such things.

"And that Aaron Grafton hasn't been there

since I was forced into this thing, I'm positive. For I *was* forced into it," grumbled the old detective. "I just couldn't resist the pleading of her eyes. It isn't the first time a man has made a fool of himself over a woman, and it won't be the last. But maybe I'll make fools of some of these folks, instead of being made a fool of myself. Fooled out of my fishing though. By gad! that's what I have been!

"But no matter. I must see what friend Aaron is up to and what his little game is. Of course, he may have been at the store the day of the murder—before I arrived. I must ask Darcy about that. Poor lad, he's in tough luck—just when he ought to be thinking of getting married. Well, I'll do what I can."

There were few tricks known to modern detectives of which Colonel Ashley was not master, among them being the ability to disguise himself—not by clumsy beards and false moustaches, though he used them at times—but by a few simple alterations to his face and carriage.

Of course costume played its part when needed, but the time had not yet come for that. He was now following Grafton without the latter being aware of it—no very difficult matter in a city the size of Colchester, and on one of its main streets.

"I think I want to know a little more about him," mused the colonel. "I'd like to have a talk

with him, and see how he acts. But I won't chance that yet. I'll play 'possum for a while."

Having followed his man to the latter's store, and even inside it, where he made a trifling purchase, and having seen Mr. Grafton enter his private office, the detective paid a visit to Darcy in the jail.

"How is she, Colonel?" were the first words of the prisoner, when they were in the warden's office with a detective from the prosecutor's office seated a few chairs away. It was only under such arrangements that visitors were allowed to see the jewelry worker. "How is Amy?"

"Why, she's very well, the last I saw of her. But I came to talk about something else."

"I suppose so. This horrible affair. But she still believes in me, doesn't she?" he asked eagerly.

"As much so as I do, my boy!"

"Thank God for that! I don't know what I'd do if she went back on me! I wouldn't want to live!"

"Tush! Nonsense! Don't get sentimental!"

"I can't help it, Colonel. But as long as Amy thinks I didn't do this horrible thing—and God knows I didn't—and as long as you believe in me—why I can stand it. Maybe it won't be for long."

"Well, there's no use buoying you up with false hopes, Darcy. You'll probably be here all summer."

"I shan't mind if I'm proved innocent at last"

"I hope we can manage that all right."

"Then you do believe in me, Colonel?"

"Of course I do! Otherwise, I wouldn't take up your case. Now don't talk too much. I want to ask you a few questions. Answer them, and as briefly as possible. I'll get you out of here as soon as I can. If I hadn't been as slow as a carp I might have the right man here now in your place."

"What do you mean, Colonel?"

"Eh? What's that? Did I say anything?" and the detective seemed roused from a reverie, for he had spoken his last remarks in a low voice.

"You spoke about a carp—the right man—"

"Oh, I—I was just thinking of something in Walton. Never mind me. It's a bad habit I've been acquiring lately of thinking aloud. Now to business!" and the colonel drew some papers from his pocket.

Darcy looked at his new friend in some surprise. Certainly the colonel had spoken as though he might, at one time, have had a chance to get the "right man." Did that mean the real murderer?

Darcy shook his head. His nerves were beginning to go back on him he feared.

"Do you know Aaron Grafton?" asked the colonel.

"Oh, yes," replied Darcy. "Every one in town knows him as one of the prominent merchants."

"Was he at the store the day of the—the day Mrs. Darcy was killed?"

"I don't remember. So many things happened—there were so many in the place. As I think back, though, I don't remember seeing him."

"Very good. Did he ever do any business with you—I mean buy anything in the store?"

"Why yes, I think very possibly he might. Most every one of prominence in Colchester, at one time or another, has made purchases in our store—some more, some less. No particular purchase made by Grafton stands out in my mind, however."

"How about having his watch repaired?"

"I'd remember, I think, if I had fixed his watch. I'm sure I didn't. He has a fine one, for I've seen him stop in front of our window and compare his time with our chronometer."

"I see. Now another matter. Can you, in any way, account for the fact that so many of the clocks in the store—clocks that, as I understand it, ordinarily go for many days—stopped at different hours the night of the killing? Can you explain that?"

Somewhat to the surprise of the colonel Darcy was silent for a moment. Then the young man slowly answered:

"No. No, I can't explain it. I don't know what did it."

"Well, then I'll have to fish on that alone, I guess. I thought you, knowing a lot about clockworks, might have some explanation. You know most of the timepieces *were* stopped—all of them, in fact, except the watch in your cousin's hand?"

"Yes, I remarked that at the time. That watch was going."

"Yes, so you told me—you thought it was her heart beating."

"I wish, oh, how I wish, it *had* been!" exclaimed Darcy in tones of despair. "If it had been I wouldn't be here. But it's too late to think of that now."

"Do you happen to know what became of that watch—the one in her hand? It belonged to an East Indian, you said."

"Yes, to Singa Phut. I was to make one little adjustment in it for him, and he was to come in early to get it. It wasn't much. The hair spring, I think, had become caught up and it ran very fast. I planned to do it the night before, but the light was too poor. So I made up my mind to get up early and attend to it. But I never got the chance. No, I don't recall what happened to that watch. I suppose the detectives have it."

"The prosecutor did take it, but Singa Phut has it now."

"He has!" cried Darcy.

"Yes, he called at the court house and begged that it be given to him. Said it was an ancient timepiece, which he had owned for many years, and as it could have no connection with the crime they let him take it."

"Oh, well, I suppose that was all right. No, Singa Phut didn't have a thing to do with the killing, I'm positive of that."

"And his *alibi* is perfect," said the colonel. "Well, I guess you've told me all I want to know. You haven't any reason to suspect any one, have you, Darcy?"

"Not a soul! God knows I wouldn't want to name any one, either, much as I'd like to get out of here myself."

"Mrs. Darcy had no enemies?"

"Not a one in the world that I know of. She was a friendly woman. Of course, that was good business policy. No, she had no enemies. Most people liked her."

"So I've heard. Well, we'll get at the truth somehow. Now brace up."

"I'm trying to, Colonel."

"Well, try harder. When I go to see Miss Mason—"

"You are going to see Amy?" cried the prisoner eagerly.

"Yes. But if I have to tell her you looked as

though you had lost every last friend you had in the world—"

"It's all right, Colonel. Tell her you saw me—laughing!" and Darcy did manage to utter what *might* pass for a laugh. It was a good attempt.

"Good! That's better, though there's room for improvement," said the detective. "Now, I'll leave you. I have lots to do."

"I'm sorry, Colonel, to put you to all this trouble—"

"Pooh! Now I'm in it there's no trouble that's too much. I'll get about the same fun out of this as I would if I fished—and I'll fish with greater enjoyment later on—when I've cleared you."

"I hope you do, Colonel. And if there's anything I can do—"

"Thanks, but Miss Mason has already arranged to have me whip her father's trout stream when this case is over, and that's reward enough for me. Now, sir, one last word to you!" and the colonel assumed the military appearance that so well befitted him. "Stop worrying!"

"I'll try, Colonel!"

"Don't try—do it."

"One question."

"Well, one only. What is it?

"Do you think Mr. Grafton—"

The detective smiled and shook his finger at Darcy.

"You just let *me* do the thinking!" he advised as he turned to go out.

Colonel Ashley spent two busy days, most of his time being given over to investigating Aaron Grafton. And the more he saw of that gentleman the more the detective became convinced that the merchant knew something of the crime.

"I wouldn't admit, even to myself," mused the colonel, "that he had a hand in it, or that he was an accessory before or after. But he certainly knows something about it, and enough to make him worry. That's what Aaron Grafton is doing—worrying. And he's worrying about something that ought to be in the jewelry shop and isn't. Now, what is it?"

This, very evidently, was something for Colonel Ashley to discover, and with all his skill he set himself to this task. For the time being he dropped several other ends—tangled ends of the skein he hoped to unravel—and devoted his time to Grafton. And, at the end of two days the detective learned that the merchant was going to make a hurried trip to New York—a trip not directly connected with his store, for those trips were made at other times of the year.

"Well, if he goes to New York I go too!" said the colonel grimly.

And he went, on the same train with Aaron Grafton, though unknown to the latter.

It was a skilful bit of shadowing the detective did on the journey to the metropolis, so skilful that, though the merchant plainly showed by his nervousness that he thought he might have been followed, he did not, seemingly, suspect the quiet man seated not far from him, reading a little green book. The colonel had adopted a simple but effective disguise.

In New York, which was reached early in the morning, after a night journey, the colonel again took up the trail, keeping near his man.

"Follow that taxi," the colonel ordered the driver of his machine as it rolled out of the Pennsylvania station, just a few lengths behind the one in which Grafton rode.

The following was well done, and, a little later the two machines drew up in front of the big office building in which Colonel Ashley had his headquarters.

"Whew!" whispered the follower of Izaak Walton, "I wonder if he came here to consult *my* agency?"

All doubts were dissolved a moment later when, keeping somewhat in the background, the detective heard the merchant ask the elevator starter on which floor were the offices of Colonel Ashley's detective agency.

"He *does* want to see me!" excitedly thought the colonel. "What in the world for? This is

getting interesting! I've got to do a little fine work now. He must never suspect, at least for a while, that I have been in Colchester."

Next to the elevator in which Aaron Grafton rode up was another.

"Tom, you're an express for the time being!" whispered the colonel to the operator. "There's a man headed for my offices, and I must get in ahead of him. Here's a dollar!"

"I get you, Colonel! Shoot!"

And the car shot up with speed enough to cause the colonel to gasp, used as he was to rapid motion.

He had just time to slide into his quarters by a rear and private door, to make certain changes in his appearance and be calmly sitting at his desk smoking a cigar when his clerk brought in the card of Aaron Grafton.

"Tell him to come in," said the colonel, more and more surprised at the turn affairs were taking. "I'll see this man myself," he continued, speaking to the man into whose hands he had put the general direction of the agency. "Say to Mr. Grafton," he said, turning to the clerk, "that Colonel Ashley will see him in a moment."

CHAPTER VIII

THE DIAMOND CROSS

"COLONEL ASHLEY?" There was a formal, questioning note in the merchant's voice.

"That is my name, yes, sir. Er—Mr. Grafton," and, as though to refresh his memory, the colonel glanced at the card on his desk.

"You are a private detective?"

"Yes."

Mr. Grafton was evidently sparring for time. He seemed uneasy—he looked uneasy, and it required no very astute mind to know that he was uneasy—out of his element.

"For all the world like a gasping fish on the bank," was the simile the colonel used.

"I have a case I wish you would take up for me," went on the merchant. "It is somewhat peculiar."

"Most cases that come to us are," and the colonel smiled.

"And it is delicate."

"I could say that of nearly every one, also."

"So that I may rely on your silence and—er—discretion?"

"Sir!"

The colonel fairly bristled.

"I beg your pardon! I should not have asked that. But I am all upset over this matter."

"Then, sir, let me ease your mind by stating that whatever you tell me will be in strict confidence, as far as lies in my power to so observe it. I can not compound a felony, so if you have in mind the disclosure of anything that would incriminate you—"

"Incriminate me?"

"Yes, or involve you in any way. If you have anything like that in mind please don't tell me about it. I should feel obliged to make use of my knowledge. But if it is a matter in which you wish my advice, then—"

"I certainly *do* need advice, Colonel. I have often heard you spoken of, and I have read of more than one of your cases. So when I got in this—well, I may as well call it trouble—I at once thought of you. I am fortunate, I believe, in seeing Colonel Ashley, himself, who, I understood, had retired, or perhaps is about to retire. I came here prepared to pay any reasonable amount," and the merchant drew out his wallet.

The colonel held up a protesting hand.

"Please don't—not yet," he said. "I can not accept a retaining fee until I have heard more of your case. It may be that I can not serve you.

Give me some inkling of what you want. I hope you are not in serious trouble."

"It is serious—for me."

"Then I hope I can help you. Please be as frank as you think best. The franker you are, the fewer questions I shall have to ask. Go on."

"Well then, I want to find a certain valuable diamond cross."

"A diamond cross?"

"Yes. I don't know just what it is worth, but I believe a small fortune."

"And was it stolen from you?"

"No. Though I do own a store where jewelry is sold, we don't carry an expensive line. This cross belonged to a friend of mine. She had it on when we were out walking together, and—well, it became damaged and I asked her to let me take it to have it repaired."

"Nothing very complicated or troublesome in that. I suppose the cross was stolen from you while it was temporarily in your possession, and you don't like to let your friend know, for fear she may suspect you. Such things have happened. Did you ever read de Maupassant's 'Diamond Necklace?' "

"I never did."

"I'd advise you to. Also Walton."

"Is he a jeweler?"

"Lord, no! But I beg your pardon. Let us

keep to the subject. So you don't dare tell your friend the diamond cross is gone?"

"Oh, yes, she knows it."

"Then why the worry, except about getting it back?"

"Well, there are complications. You see her husband—"

"Oh, ho!"

There was a world of meaning in that exclamation. Aaron Grafton turned a deep red and bit his lips. Colonel Ashley saw his annoyance.

"Look here!" exclaimed the old detective. "I really shouldn't have said that. But we detectives are used to all sorts of complications, and, more than once, they have to do with women. Often enough there is nothing more serious than a little indiscretion, but I can see where outsiders might make trouble—particularly *husbands*. I take it then that you and the lady were out together without her husband knowing it."

"I *hope* he doesn't know of it, for though, on my honor, there was nothing wrong in our being together, it might be hard to make *him* believe that."

"I quite agree with you—particularly if he were jealous, as many husbands are. So you want me to try to get this diamond cross, belonging to the married lady, back for you without her husband knowing anything about it ?"

"That's it!"

"Where were you when you were robbed of it?"

"I wasn't robbed of it. I never said I was."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I must have inferred that. Please go on, and, if you don't mind my asking you, kindly get to the point."

"I beg your pardon. Perhaps I am beating about the bush. Well, I'll be as frank as I can. Do you want me to give names?"

"It would be better, since I already know yours. I shall keep them in strict confidence, however, now that I am fairly well assured there is no ulterior motive in your visit to me. Proceed."

"Well, then, the diamond cross, which is worth I don't know how many thousand dollars, belongs to Mrs. Cynthia Larch, the wife of Langford Larch, who keeps a large hotel in—"

"Colchester! I know the place. Go on!" interruped Colonel Ashley. "I have stopped there on fishing trips," he added, as his caller looked a bit surprised.

"Oh, I didn't know that. Well, this was Mrs. Larch's cross. It is a family heirloom I believe, though many suppose her husband gave it to her for a wedding present. That is not so, however. I know Cynthia had the cross before she was married."

"You call her Cynthia?"

"I have kown her since we were both children."

"I see. Pray go on."

"In fact we were sweethearts," continued Grafton, "and were engaged. But the match was broken off by her father. I was only a struggling clerk then, and never dreamed I would get on as I have. Nor did she, I fancy, though she was willing to take me as I was. But her folks made trouble. They brought such pressure to bear on her that she gave in and married Larch, who was and is wealthy, but whose social position was beneath hers.

"Don't think I am telling you this out of mere jealousy," Aaron Grafton went on, and his manner was earnest. "I loved her deeply and sincerely. I do yet, but in a way that is perfectly right. I have not told her so—but—" He was silent a moment.

"I went away after she threw me over," he resumed. "I couldn't stand it to be near her and see her going out—with him. But I came back. Though the old wound still hurt, I tried not to let her see. We became friends again—in fact we had never ceased to be friends.

"Perhaps I have acted foolishly, but, of late, I have seen her quite often. I began to feel that her married life was not happy. I took pains to enquire, and learned that it was not. I tried to make her a little happier by talking to her. Once

or twice she met me and we walked together in the woods."

The colonel looked sharply at his caller.

"Oh, for God's sake don't put any wrong construction on it! I'd give my very life to make her happy, and do you think I'd—"

"I don't doubt you for a moment, sir!"

"Thank you," said Mr. Grafton. "It is good to know that there is still some truth and honor in the world and that a man and woman can be friends though the circumstances seem peculiar."

He paused a moment to overcome his emotion and resumed:

"Well, Cynthia and I are friends—good friends. It was to talk over what course was best for her to pursue under certain circumstances that she and I walked out together. We went in secret, for there are gossiping and wagging tongues in Colchester as elsewhere, and if I, the leading merchant in the town, was seen to be alone with pretty Cynthia Larch, whose husband was a friend of judges and politicians who frequent his hotel, there would be talk little short of scandal."

"I quite agree with you. So you walked in secret?"

"Yes. And it was while we were out together that the cross she was wearing became unfastened and fell. I most clumsily, stepped on it, greatly marring the setting.

"She was distressed, of course, but I said I would take it to a jeweler's and have it repaired without any one being the wiser. She agreed that was best. So I took it—"

"To Mrs. Darcy's place, and she was found murdered!" broke in the old detective quickly.

Aaron Grafton started from his chair.

"How in the name of Heaven did you know that?" he cried. "I thought that not a soul but I knew it. I did not even tell Cynthia!"

"The explanation is simple," said the colonel. "I will be almost as frank with you as you have been with me. I know more about you than you think. Wait a moment."

The colonel stepped into a closet. He made a few rapid changes in his clothing and took off a tiny bit of eyebrow, which had been added to his own a short time before. Then he confronted the merchant.

"The man I saw in the jewelry store!" gasped Grafton. "I remember, now, seeing you there the day I went to look for the diamond cross."

"And didn't find it," said the detective. "I wondered what so perturbed you, but now I know. At first I did think you might know something of the murder—"

"God forbid!" said the merchant earnestly and reverently.

"Amen!" echoed the colonel. "You have told

such a straightforward story that I can not doubt you. That is why I revealed myself to you. But you must keep my secret if I am to help you. I am known in Colchester as Colonel Brentnall, having registered at the hotel under that name. I will keep that name for the present. I followed you here—in fact, I only entered this office a minute or two ahead of you. So it was to find the diamond cross you visited the store of the murdered woman?"

"Yes. When I had damaged the cross by stepping on it, I thought my old friend, Mrs. Darcy, would be the best one to keep my secret. I took the cross to her the night before she was killed, and she promised to have her cousin fix it without telling him whose it was and get it back to me, secretly, in a day or so.

"I thought Cynthia could then wear it again without her husband knowing it had ever been out of her possession. But the murder changed all my plans. As soon as I could, I went to the shop to look for the cross. I thought perhaps it might have been put in one of the showcases, or laid on the shelf, perhaps forgotten. Really I was so distressed, I didn't know what to think. I did not want to tell any one what I was looking for, so I went about quietly. But I could not find it. Then I was obliged to ask Darcy about it, secretly, of course, and without hinting as to the ownership.

"But he had never seen it. He said Mrs. Darcy had not given it to him, nor asked him to repair it. Nor was it in the shop, as far as he knew, and he went over all the stock to furnish a list to the police, so they could tell whether or not there had been a robbery."

"And there was none?"

"None, unless you call the taking of the diamond cross a theft. For that alone is missing. And I'd give half my fortune to get it back. Cynthia's husband may ask about it at any moment, and what excuse can she give?"

"It is rather a ticklish matter," agreed the detective. "Well, I'll see what I can do. First I thought you wanted me to work on the murder case. But as I am already engaged on that, to try to clear Darcy, I can as well include the diamond cross mystery also. I wonder if they have any connection."

"I don't see how they can have. Mrs. Darcy may merely have put the cross away secretly, and it may take a careful search of the place to find it."

"Maybe so. I'll have to nose around a bit."

There came a knock on the office door.

"Come!" called out the colonel.

His clerk handed him a telegram. Tearing it open the detective read a message from one of his agents in a distant western city: It said:

"Spotty Morgan arrested here to-day. Big diamond cross found on him. Do you want him?"

"Do I want him?" fairly yelled the colonel. "I should say I did! Here, get me Blake on the long distance. This is no time for a wire. I've got to telephone!" And he hurried to a private booth in a back office, leaving Grafton to himself.

After he had telephoned, Colonel Ashley sat in silence in the booth, musing.

"Now I wonder," he said to himself, "if Grafton is telling me the truth. Almost any one would believe his story—it sounds straight enough—and yet I can't take any chances. I guess I mustn't lose sight of you, Aaron Grafton.

"And perhaps Larch isn't so bad a chap as you'd have me believe. Trust a disgruntled lover for saying the worst about the other chap. Yes, I can't afford to take any chances. You may know a bit more about this murder than you're telling me, even considering the latest from my friend Spotty. Yes, you may be playing a double game, Mr. Aaron Grafton."

CHAPTER IX

INDICTED

"Well, Spotty, I've got to hand it to you! Certainly you did put one over on me!"

"Not intentional, Colonel. So help me—not intentional!"

"Well, maybe not, but I've got to hand it to you. If I didn't know that slip of mine in front of the truck was pure accident, I'd say you staged it just to make a good get-away."

"I couldn't do that, Colonel."

"I don't know, Spotty. You're a clever kid."

"But I couldn't do that. I was on the level in saving you. You've got to give me credit for that," pleaded the gunman.

"I know you were, Spotty. And that's why I gave you a chance to get away. But I never thought it was for a job like this—murder."

"And it wasn't, Colonel—it wasn't! So help me, I never laid eyes on the old lady—dead or alive! Murder? I should say not!"

"Then how did you get that diamond cross? Answer me!"

Colonel Ashley, with a dramatic gesture, pointed to the glittering ornament that lay on the table between him and the New York crook. The stones glittered in the electric lights of police headquarters, for it was there, in the distant city, that this talk took place.

Confirming over the long distance telephone the news given in his agent's telegram, Colonel Ashley, without having revealed to Grafton what new development had occurred, had made a quick trip to Lango, where Spotty, in response to a quiet but general alarm sent out, had been arrested.

A diamond cross had been found in his possession, and was bent and flattened—crushed by some heavy foot—though all the stones were intact.

Spotty admitted that the ornament might be the very one wanted, but he absolutely refused to tell how he had come by it. He was most emphatic, however, in denying that he had taken it from Mrs. Darcy, or that he had even seen her or been to her store.

"I'm a bad man, Colonel, you know that, and maybe if I was to go to the chair—or the rope, according to where I was caught—I wouldn't be getting any more than was comin' to me. But, so help me, I never croaked that old lady!"

"Then how did you get that cross?"

"I won't tell you!"

"I'll make you, Spotty!" and there was a dangerous glint in the eyes of the colonel.

"You can't!" defied the crook. "There ain't a man livin' that can! Go on with your third degree if you want to!" he sneered. "But for every blow you strike—for every hour you keep me awake when I'm dead for sleep—you'll be sorry, Colonel! You'll be sorry when you think of what might have happened back there in Colchester!"

"Spotty, you're right!" faltered the colonel. "I almost wish you hadn't saved me. I've got to do my duty! I've got to break you if need be, Spotty, to get at the truth. I want to know who killed Mrs. Darcy and where you got that cross! I want to know, and, by gad! I'm going to know!"

"Not from me, Colonel! I never saw the old lady, dead or alive, and I never knew until just now when you told me, that she'd ever had this cross."

"Who gave it to you?"

"Colonel, did you ever know me to split on a pal unless he split first?"

"No, Spotty. I never did."

"Well, then, you stand a fine chance in getting me to do it now. Go to it if you like. I'm through spielin'!" and the crook turned away with an air of indifference.

The colonel knew that Spotty never would tell,

until he wanted to, but it did not deter him. He "went at" Spotty. What happened in the quiet room, near the police headquarter cells, need not form part of this record. Enough to say that when they let Spotty go staggering back to his dungeon, a wreck of a man physically and mentally for the time being, he had not told.

And the glittering stones in the crushed cross were not more silent than he in his misery—deserved perhaps, but none the less misery.

And when the colonel, rather upset himself by what he had been forced to go through, started back for Colchester, he took with him the memory of Spotty's rather sneering face and the echo of his words:

"Well, Colonel, I didn't tell!"

And he had not. The diamond cross still kept its mystery.

Colonel Ashley fumed, fretted, and fidgeted until he was on the verge of a sleepless night on his way back in the train. Then he bethought himself of his little green book, and he read:

"You are to know, then, that there is a night as well as a day fishing for a trout, and that in the night the best trout come out of their holes."

"Ah, ha," mused the colonel. "I think I shall have to do a little night fishing."

So saying, having read a little farther in his Izaak Walton, he went peacefully to his berth

and awoke calmer and himself again.

But if the colonel felt refreshed on reaching Colchester, it was not because he felt that he was in a fair way to solve the problem—or, rather, the many problems connected with the Darcy murder.

"It's worse tangled than before," mused the old detective. "I wonder if Grafton— No, it couldn't be. But I must have a talk with his friend Cynthia. Ticklish business when a man goes out walking with a married woman and steps on her cross. There are complications and complications. I wonder when I'll begin to unravel some of them?"

For reasons of his own, the colonel said nothing to the police or county authorities in Colchester about the arrest of Spotty, nor did he mention that, nor the finding of the diamond cross, to Darcy or Grafton. He wanted to be sure of his ground before he told of this end of the affair.

"I wish I knew what to make of Grafton," mused the colonel. "His share in it—if share he had—is getting more complicated. Can he and Spotty be up to some trick between them and did the gunman get away with the cross? It wouldn't be the first time Spotty had hired out his services to a man who wanted something desperate done! Now in this case, Grafton may have wanted something from Mrs. Darcy she wasn't willing to do. In that case—"

The colonel shook his head.

"I guess," he half-whispered, "that Shag was right. This is going to be a mighty complicated case. Talk about a diamond cross, there may be a double-cross in it on the part of Grafton. I must watch you a bit closer, my friend."

The colonel considered that he was working to clear Darcy, and he wanted to do it in his own way. He was willing—perforce—that, for the time, the young man be considered guilty. He could not help the young man by making these few disclosures now. The prisoner would not be released because Spotty or any one else was suspected, nor would he be admitted to bail. In any case he must remain in jail.

The Grand Jury was setting considering the evidence against the prisoner, and against others accused of various crimes.

"And I suppose they'll indite Darcy," mused the colonel. "It means only another step, however, a step I have already counted on. It won't help or hinder the solving of the mystery. Hang Spotty, anyhow! Why couldn't he keep out of this? He surely has tangled it worse than ever. I wonder if he's telling the truth when he says he didn't go near the place? It was Spotty, or one of his kind, who got in and out without leaving a trace. It took Spotty's skill. But—I don't know. I must have another look around the jewelry store."

A day or so after his return from the West, the colonel made a close examination of the shop. Just what he was looking for he hardly knew, but he was quite surprised when he discovered, connected with the main lighting wires of the store, other wires which ran to various places in the shelves and the show windows, where many of the clocks stood.

"I wonder if that's a new kind of burglar alarm," thought the colonel. "If it is, it's the first time I've ever seen one hooked up to the electric light circuit. A bad thing in case of a short circuit. A person might get a shock that would knock him down and—"

Something seemed to give the colonel a new idea. He made a hurried examination of the wires and then left the store, to be seen a little later at the establishment of an electrician, where he stayed some time.

It was late that afternoon, when the papers, in extra editions, announced the indictment of James Darcy for the murder of his cousin.

When Colonel Ashley returned to his hotel from the electrician's, he found Amy Mason waiting for him.

"Oh, Colonel! isn't this dreadful?" she exclaimed, holding out a paper. "It's so—so—"

"Tut, tut! my dear young lady, this is noth-

ing! It is only a little shoot on the main stem. Don't let it distress you. It was to be expected."

"I know! But it sounds so dreadful! Before, he was only suspected, even though formally charged. Now it seems as if he were found *guilty!*"

"Far from it. The only evidence against him, just as it has been all along, is circumstantial. They have yet to prove anything, and I don't believe they can. Cheer up! I'll get him off yet!"

"Are you sure, Colonel?" and her eyes were bright with unshed tears.

"Sure? Why, of course I am!"

And yet the colonel had to force himself a bit to make that sound natural. Perhaps it was because he had said it so often and was tired.

Or did it have anything to do with the strange wires that led to the work table of James Darcy?

CHAPTER X

THE DEATH WATCH

Doctor Warren, the county physician, stopping in at police headquarters, as he often did on returning from his round of private visits, to see if there were any official calls for him, encountered Detective Carroll.

"Hello, Doc!" was the genial greeting, for Doctor Warren was more than a physician. He was a politician, and politics and the police were no more divorced in Colchester than elsewhere. "Seen that colonel guy to-day?" asked Carroll.

"The colonel guy?" The doctor's voice showed his puzzlement.

"Yes, the chap that's working with Kenneth on the Darcy case."

"Seen him? No, I haven't."

"He was here looking for you a little while ago. Seemed quite anxious about meeting you. Here he is now. Say, if he lets out anything we can use against Darcy—you know, legitimate stuff—pass it on to me and Thong, will you? You know we've got to go on the stand, and, between you and me, our case ain't any too strong."

"That's right. I'll let you know what I hear," and the two ended their half-whispered talk as Colonel Ashley entered police headquarters.

It was his third visit to headquarters that day in search of Doctor Warren, and he would state the object of his seeking to none other. Now he smiled at the man he had been looking for. They had met previously.

"Ah, good afternoon, Doctor Warren. I've been looking for you," was the colonel's greeting. "If you're not busy, sir, I'd like just a few minutes of your time—officially, of course."

"Always ready for duty, Colonel. I guess you military men know that we doctors are in a sort of class with yourselves when it comes to that."

"You're right. Now I won't be much more than a minute, and what I want to ask you, I can propound right here as well as anywhere. You know I'm working to save Darcy?"

"So I've heard."

"Well, you examined Mrs. Darcy soon after she was found dead. You may, or you may not, have formed an opinion as to *who* killed her, but I judge you are positive as to *how* she was killed —I mean the nature of the wound."

"There were two wounds you know—a fracture of the skull just back of the right ear, and a stab wound in the left side which punctured the heart. Either would have caused death."

"Can you tell which killed her?"

"I should say the stab wound, but I can not be positive. You understand, Colonel, that I am to go on the stand for the prosecution and tell all I know about this case."

"Oh, yes, I realize that, of course. You are practically a witness against Darcy. And I don't, for one moment, wish you to think that I am trying to get advance information to use in his favor. This is simply in the matter of justice, the ends of which I know you wish to serve, as I do myself. So if I ask anything improper please stop me. But since you will testify about these wounds, and since you have already pretty well described them to the newspaper reporters, it can do no harm to repeat the details to me."

"None in the least, Colonel."

"Then you feel sure the stab wound killed her?"

"Reasonably so. Of course, as I said, either blow could have caused death, but blows on the head, even when the skull is badly fractured, as in this case, do not invariably cause death instantly. In fact the victim usually lingers for several hours in an unconscious state. Not so, however, in the case of a stab wound in or near the heart. That is almost always fatal within a short space of time—a minute or two. So, while it is possible that Mrs. Darcy was first stunned by a blow on the head, which eventually would have killed her, I

think death almost at once followed the stab wound."

"Could both have been delivered by the same person?"

"Of course. First the blow on the head, followed by the stab wound."

"And there were no other injuries on the body?"

"None, except minor bruises caused by the fall to the floor. But they were superficial."

"Nothing else?"

"No—um let me see—no, I think not."

"Are you *sure,* Dr. Warren?"

The colonel's voice had a strange ring in it.

"Why, yes, I am sure. I was about to say that there was a slight abrasion in the palm of the left hand, a sort of scratch or puncture, as though from a pin, but as she was in the jewelry business and, as I understand it, often made slight repairs herself to brooches and pins brought in, this could easily be accounted for."

"A slight abrasion in the left hand you say?"

"Yes. But I don't attach any importance to that. It was so slight that I and my assistant only gave it a passing glance. It hardly penetrated the skin."

"I see. In the left hand. This is the hand in which the ticking watch was found, was it not?"

"I believe so. The watch belonging to an Indian named Singa Phut. By the way what be-

came of him?" the doctor asked of Detective Carroll, who had strolled out of the detectives' private room and was listening to the conversation.

"Oh, that gink? He made a big howl about getting back his watch, and as he had a perfectly good *alibi,* and we could fasten nothing on him, we give it back to him and told him to beat it. He did, I guess."

"No, he is still in town," said Colonel Ashley. "I passed his place a while ago. He has a pair of beautiful Benares candlesticks, in the form of hooded cobra snakes, that I want to get. Singa Phut is still in town."

"Does that answer all your questions, Colonel?" inquired Dr. Warren. "I'll tell you all I can, in reason, but if—"

"Thank you! You've told me all I cared to know. I have some theories I want to work on, and I'm not sure how they'll turn out."

"I s'pose you think Darcy didn't do this job," cut in Carroll, rather sneeringly.

"I'm positive he didn't, sir!" and the colonel drew himself up and looked uncompromisingly at the headquarters detective. "If I thought he had done it, I would not be associated with his case."

"You're going to have a sweet job proving he didn't do it," laughed the officer.

"Maybe," assented the colonel unruffled.

"Who else could have croaked her?" pursued

Carroll. "Here he goes and has a quarrel with the old lady just before he goes to bed. He's sore at her because he thinks she's keeping back part of his coin. Then he's sore because she made some cracks about his girl—that's enough to get any man riled. I don't blame Darcy for going off his nut. But he shouldn't have croaked the old lady. He done it all right, and we got the goods on him! You'll see!"

"Well, it's your business, of course—yours and that of the prosecutor—to prove him guilty," said the colonel. "And you can't quarrel with me if I try to prove him innocent."

"Sure not, Colonel. Every man's got to earn his bread and butter somehow. Only I hate to see you kid yourself along believing this guy didn't do the job. He done it, I tell you!"

"Maybe," half assented the colonel. "Thank you, Dr. Warren. We shall meet again," and, with a military salute, the colonel went out of police headquarters. As he descended the steps he silently mused:

"I wonder what Carroll and Thong would say if they knew about the diamond cross, and heard that Spotty Morgan had it? I guess they would change some of their theories then. Which reminds me that I have more irons in the fire than I suspected. I must not lose sight of Cynthia. She will be getting anxious about her diamonds,

and I would like to see what she says when *she* hears the truth."

Though Colonel Ashley had given up all hopes of having a use for his beloved fishing rods and flies, at least on this trip to Colchester, he did not give up his perusal of Walton's book.

It was one evening while sitting in his room at the hotel, idly turning over the pages, hardly able to concentrate his mind on what he read for much thinking of the diamond cross mystery, that his eye chanced on page 170, where he saw the passage:

"There be also three or four other little fish that I had almost forgot, that are all without scales—"

The book dropped from the detective's hand.

"Gad!" he exclaimed. "That's what I've been forgetting—the *little* fish. I must get after some of them. They may turn the scale in our favor. Little fish! That's it. Small fry, when you can't get big ones! I wonder—"

There was a knock at the door and Shag entered, bowing and saluting military style at the same time.

"Scuse me, Colonel, sah," he began, "but does yo' want t' heah any news?"

"Any news, Shag? What sort? Come, speak up, you rascal!"

"Well, sah, Colonel, yo' done tell me, when we

come heah, not t' trouble yo' wif any detective news, but—"

"Oh, that was before I got mixed up in this Darcy case, Shag. The prohibition is off, so to speak. If you have any news—"

"No, sah, Colonel, 'tisn't 'bout po' ole Miss Darcy—leastways not *much* about her. But dere's been annudder murder in town."

"Another murder?"

"Yes, Colonel. Boys on de streets yellin' extry papers now, all 'bout de murder."

"Who is it? Where? When did it happen?"

"Jest 'bout a hour ago. It's a man—a Indian man whut kept a curiosity shop—de same place where yo' an' me was lookin' at dem funny snake candlesticks las' week."

"Singa Phut's place? Great Scott, Shag! You don't mean to tell me, *he's* killed, do you?"

"No, sah, Colonel! Dat Mr. Phut ain't killed. It's his partner. He's got a funny name, too. Heah, I done brought yo' a paper," and Shag pulled out an extra from under his vest, where he had carefully kept it concealed until he had made sure of his master's frame of mind.

The colonel scanned the front page with its black type eagerly. Surely enough, there had been a murder. Shere Ali, Singa Phut's partner, had been found lying on the floor of the little curiosity shop with his head crushed in.

"And in the dead man's hand was a ticking watch," read the colonel.

For a moment he stared at the words. Then a light seemed to come over his face. He crushed the paper in his hand, and then spread it out to read again the startling news, while he murmured:

"The watch of death!"

CHAPTER XI

NO ALIMONY

"SHAG!" exclaimed the colonel.

"Yes, sah!"

"We're going fishing tomorrow!"

"Is we, Colonel? Den I s'pects yo'll want t' git—"

"Get everything ready, yes. We'll go again to that place where Miss Mason found me. There's as good fish in that stream as any I didn't catch, and I want to try my luck."

"Yes, sah, Colonel. But, scuse me, didn't yo, figger on doin' some detectin' an' give up fishin'?" and Shag, with the freedom of an old servant, stood looking at his master as if not quite understanding the new twist the affairs had taken.

"That's all right, Shag. You do as I tell you. I'm going off fishing. I may not catch anything—I may not want to after I get there. But for a quiet place to think, give me a fishing excursion every time! And I've got to do some tall thinking now. Get ready, Shag!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel!"

And, having put himself in a fair way, as he

hoped, to solve some of the problems connected with the Darcy case, Colonel Ashley went down to police headquarters to learn more facts in connection with the murder of the East Indian.

Carroll and Thong were there, and if they did not exactly welcome the colonel as a kindred spirit they at least accorded him the respect due a fellow craftsman in the peculiar line where talent may be found most unexpectedly. And Carroll and Thong who, with other headquarters men, now knew the colonel's identity, were not above learning a trick or two, even if they had to take them from the book of their rival. For they recognized that the colonel would be against them and the prosecutor's detectives when it came to the trial of James Darcy.

"Well, boys, what's this I hear about another murder?" asked Colonel Ashley when he had passed over some of his cigars, the flavor of which the two headquarters men had been longing to taste again.

"Some Dago had his head busted in," remarked Thong. "It isn't our case, so we don't know much about it."

"No? Who has it?"

"Pinkus and Donovan; haven't they, Carroll?"

"Yep." Carroll was too much engaged in watching the blue smoke curl lazily upward from his cigar just then to say more.

"Like to talk with 'em about it?" went on Thong, in friendlier tones.

"If they're here, yes."

"I think they just came in," said Thong, bringing his feet down with a bang from the table on which he had had them elevated. "Are you going to work on that case, Colonel?"

"Oh, no. I was just interested, as Singa Phut was one concerned in Mrs. Darcy's murder."

"But he hadn't any more to do with it, Colonel, than that cat!" and Carroll pointed to the headquarters cat which was sleeping near a radiator, for the day had turned cold and steam was on in the place.

"Perhaps not," admitted Colonel Ashley. "But there are some peculiar coincidences and, if you don't mind, I'd like to see what I can find out about them."

"Go as far as you like, Colonel," returned Thong, needlessly generous. "We've got our man, and that's all we want. The other isn't our case. Oh, Donovan!" he called, as he saw a fellow sleuth passing through an outer room. "Here's some one to see you," and the presentation was quickly and informally made. The two men had seen each other before, but had not spoken.

"Glad to know you, Colonel Ashley," said Donovan. "I've read a lot about you. You're on the Darcy case, they tell me."

"In a way, yes. I'm working in the interests of the young man. But I hear you have another murder."

"Yes, but it's so plain there's no interest in it for you. All we want to do—Pinkus and me—is to lay our hands on the Dago that done it and got away. We'll get him, too, before many days. He's the kind of a feller that can't hide very well, unless he goes and kills himself, and he may do that."

"How did it happen? And is there any truth in the newspaper story about the same watch that was found in Mrs. Darcy's hand being found in the hand of the dead man?"

"Yes, that part's true enough, but that's all there is to it. It's just one of them coincidences like. Singa Phut got back his watch after the prosecutor decided he didn't need it for evidence. There wasn't nothing that Singa had to do with the Darcy case anyhow, and he seemed awful anxious to get back that watch. So it was turned over to him."

"But did he really kill his partner?"

"Surest thing you know. Busted his head in with a heavy candlestick—one of a pair. I've got 'em here, look," and, opening a closet where he temporarily kept his collection of evidence, Donovan took out a pair of heavy bronze candlesticks, in the form of hooded cobras.

"That's the one that did the business," said the headquarters detective, showing one candlestick with something dark and unpleasant on the heavier end.

"Gad!" exclaimed the colonel. "The very pair I was going to buy!"

"What! You buy?" cried Donovan. "Look here, Colonel! do you know anything about this?" and the detective's professional instincts got the upper hand of his friendliness.

"Not the least in the world—not as much as you do," was the cool answer. "I happened to see those candlesticks in the window of Singa Phut's shop the other day, and I made up my mind to buy them when I had a chance. Now, I'm afraid I won't. But how did it happen?"

"Oh, well, there isn't much of a story to it," and Donovan's voice showed his disappointment. "Phut—I don't know whether that's his first or his last name—anyhow, he had a partner named Shere Ali. No one knows much about Ali, for he came here just recently. Anyhow, he and Phut didn't get along very well it seems.

"Neighbors often heard 'em scrappin' a lot, and this afternoon they went at it again hot and heavy. Then things quieted down, and nobody heard anything more. Toward dark a man went in to buy a lamp. He found the place without a light in it, stumbled over something on the floor,

and there was Ali's body, with the head busted in and this heavy candlestick near it.

"He raised the howl right off, and Pinkus and I got there as soon as we could. Of course Phut was gone. But we'll get him!"

"Then you think he did it?"

"Sure he did! Who else?"

"And the watch was in Ali's hand?"

"Sure! Held so tight we could hardly get it out. In fact it was so tight that he's cut his palm grabbin' hold of it. Maybe the fight was about who owned the watch, for the Dagos talked in their foreign lingo and none of the neighbors could tell what they were sayin'."

"I see. And the watch? Have you it?"

"Yes, it's here. Going yet, too. Hear it tick?" and Donovan held open the door of his closet. From the place, in which hung odd coats, caps and other garments, and from the shelf on which was a collection of gruesome weapons, came an insistent ticking.

"That's the watch," announced the headquarters detective, reaching in for it. "Going yet—see?" and he held it out to Colonel Ashley.

Somewhat to the surprise of Donovan the military detective accepted the timepiece on his open palm, and so gingerly that it caused Donovan to remark:

"You're not as squeamish as all that, are you?

Just because it was in a dead man's hand—and in a woman's?"

"Oh, not at all," was the quick answer. "But, as a matter of fact these East Indians are often carriers of bubonic plague, you know, and it's very contagious. Of course neither Shere Ali nor Singa Phut may have had the germs about them, but I am a bit squeamish when it comes to contagious diseases of that nature, and I wouldn't like to scratch myself on that watch."

"Scratch yourself—on a watch?" and Donovan's voice was plainly skeptical.

"Yes. It may have some rough edges on it. And I've read enough about germs to know the danger. I'd advise you to be careful!"

"Ha!" laughed Donovan shortly. "I should worry about that! The watch don't figure in the case, except maybe they quarreled over who owned it."

Colonel Ashley said nothing. He was carefully examining the watch, which he still held in the palm of the hand—holding it as carefully as though indeed it might be laden with germs the least touch of which against a tiny scratch might produce death.

"Quite a curiosity," said the colonel at length. "If you don't mind, I should like to examine this a bit."

"You can't take it away," said Donovan. "I

may need it as evidence when we get Mr. Phut, or whatever the Dago's name is."

"Oh, no, I wouldn't think of taking it away. I'll look at it here. It seems to be a very old timepiece—one of the first made smaller than the old 'Nuremberg eggs I fancy. Quite an interesting study—watches—Donovan. Ever take it up?" and as the colonel questioned he was looking at the Indian timepiece under a magnifying glass he took from his pocket.

"Who? Me study watches? I should say not! It keeps me busy enough here without that."

"Yes," went on the colonel musingly. "This is an old-timer. The first watches, you know, Donovan, were really small clocks, and some were so much like clocks that the folks who carried them had to hang them to their belts instead of carrying them in their pockets. That was away back in the fifteenth century."

"Before the Big Wind in Ireland," suggested Thong with a nod at his Irish compatriot.

"Slightly," laughed the colonel. "But, all joking aside, this is quite a wonderful piece of work. I shouldn't be surprised but what it dated back to the time of Queen Elizabeth, though it has been repaired and remodeled since then to make it more up to date. Probably new works put in. Queen Elizabeth was very fond of watches and clocks, and her friends, knowing that, used to present

her with beautiful specimens. Some of the watches of her day were made in the form of crosses, purses, little books, and even skulls."

"Pity this one wasn't made that way—like a skull," mused Carroll, "seeing it's been in on two deaths here and no one knows how many somewhere else."

"That's right," agreed the colonel, as he continued to move his magnifying glass over the surface of the still ticking watch. And a close observer might have observed that he did not touch his bare fingers to the timepiece, but poked it about, and touched it here and there, with the end of a leadpencil.

"Very interesting," observed the colonel, as he passed the watch back to Donovan, still using only the flat, open palm of his hand on which to rest it. "Very interesting. And, Donovan, take a friend's advice and don't be too free with that watch."

"Too free with it?" asked the surprised detective.

"Yes. Don't scratch yourself on it, whatever you do."

"Why not? Not that I'm likely to, for I never heard of being scratched by a watch, but why not?"

"Simply because this watch——"

But at that moment the doorman of police

headquarters stuck his head in "Scotland Yard," as the patrolmen designated the inner sanctum where the detectives had their rooms, and called:

"Donovan!"

"Hello," answered the sleuth.

"Some one out here to see you."

"All right—be there in a second. Excuse me," he murmured to the colonel. "Be back in a minute."

But it was in less time than that that he came returning on the run, and his face showed excitement.

"What's up?" asked Carroll.

"Singa Phut," was the panting answer. "Friend of mine just tipped me off where I can get him! See you later!" and, making sure that his blackjack and revolver were in his pockets, Donovan hurried out, followed by the colonel, whose hand had loosely closed over the ticking watch which, unseen, went out with him.

Later that night Singa Phut, a silent, shrinking and somewhat pathetic figure, slept in a cell at police headquarters. Donovan, on the information brought in by a stool-pigeon, had made the arrest and was jubilant thereat.

Colonel Ashley, with Shag at the proper distance in the background, and with Jay Kenneth as his invited guest, was sitting on the bank of

a little stream, fishing; or, at any rate, he was somewhat idly using a rod and line to aid him in his thoughts.

Following his visit to police headquarters and his return to the hotel, he had called Kenneth on the telephone and arranged to spend a quiet day with him in the fields near the stream.

"I want to talk over Darcy's case with you," the colonel had said.

And the two had talked, had thought, had talked again, and now were silent for a time.

"What are the chances of getting him off legally if we go at it from a negative standpoint?" asked the colonel. "I mean, Mr. Kenneth, if we call upon the prosecution to make out their best case, which they can do only by circumstantial evidence, and then put our man on the stand, to deny everything, to have him tell about the noise in the night, about the curious sensation he experienced, about the possibility of chloroform, call witnesses as to his good character—and so on—what are the chances?"

"Rather a hypothetical question, Colonel, but I should say it might be a fifty-fifty proposition. At best he would get off with a Scotch verdict of 'not proven,' but he doesn't want that, nor do I. And you——"

"I don't want it, either. But I want to know just where we stand. Now I know. We've got

to prove James Darcy innocent by establishing the fact that some one else killed his cousin."

"Exactly. And can it be done?"

"It can, and I'm going to do it. But I need to do a little more smoking-out first. Now I want to think. If you'll excuse me I'll pretend I'm fishing, and I may catch something. In fact, I have a feeling that I'll land my fish. And perhaps you have some other problems that may be clarified by a dallying along this stream. Ah, there's nothing like the philosophy of my friend Izaak Walton. I'd recommend him to you instead of Blackstone."

"Thanks!" laughed Kenneth. "I am not altogether unfamiliar with the Complete Angler. And you are right. I have a little problem on my hands."

"What is it? Perhaps I can help you. The old adage of two heads, you know—"

"Yes. It still holds good. Well, the question I am trying to solve is why did she say: 'No alimony!' "

" 'No alimony'?" repeated the colonel, puzzled.

"Yes. Just that. As you may have guessed, it's a divorce case I have just finished, and so quietly that it hasn't become public property yet. When it does it will create a sensation."

"No alimony, eh? I suppose the lady—there is a lady in it, of course?" questioned the colonel.

"Of course—as is usual in a divorce case. And there's no reason you shouldn't know. It's Mrs. Larch, wife of Langford Larch, the wealthy hotel owner. She has just been granted, on my application before the vice chancellor, a separation from her husband, but she refused to accept alimony, and for the life of me, with all Larch's wealth, I can't see why. That's my problem, Colonel!"

CHAPTER XII

THE ODD COIN

Colonel Ashley fished for a time in silence, broken only by the gentle snores of Shag, farther back in the field, and by the murmur of the water. The old colored man, wrapped in a warm coat, for it was not summer yet, seemed to be enjoying his siesta when, with a suddenness that was startling in that solitude, the military detective uttered a cry of:

"I've got it!"

"What?" called Kenneth. "The solution to my problem?"

"No! My fish!" chuckled the colonel, as he skilfully played the luckless trout, now struggling to get loose from the hook.

And when the fish was landed, panting on the grass, and Shag had been roused from his slumber to slip the now limp fish into the creel, Colonel Ashley gave a sigh of relief and remarked:

"I think I see it now."

"The reason she asked no alimony?" inquired Kenneth.

"No. I wasn't thinking of that. But I have

been gathering up some loose ends, and I think I know where to tie them together. However, don't think I'm not interested in your case. I've fished enough for to-day. Not that, ordinarily, I'm satisfied with one, but I'm not working the rod now. I am, as Shag calls it, 'detectin',' and I just came out here to clarify my thoughts. Having done that, I'm at your service, if I can help."

"Well, I don't know that you can. As I said, the facts of the separation of the Larchs will soon be heralded all over the city, for the final papers were filed to-day, and the reporters will be sure to see them. So there is no harm in my telling you about it. It's' a plain and sordid story enough, with the exception of her refusal of alimony, and that I can't understand. Do you care to hear about it?"

"Certainly, my dear Kenneth."

"It has no connection with the Darcy murder, and so I didn't mention it to you before."

"Go on."

"It isn't generally known," went on the lawyer, "that the hotel keeper's wife has left him. She went away a short time ago, and came to me and told me her story. It was one of what at first might be called refined cruelty on her husband's part, degenerating gradually into that of the baser sort."

"You don't mean that Larch struck her—that

there was physical abuse, do you?" asked the colonel.

"That's what he did. He seems to have been decent for a while after their marriage—which marriage was a mistake from the first—I can see that now. I used to know Cynthia when she was a girl—she was the daughter of Lodan Ratchford, and her mother had peculiar and, to my mind, wrong ideas of social position and money. Well, poor Cynthia is paying the penalty now. She was really forced into this marriage which, to say the least, must have been distasteful to her. But I don't suppose more than two or three know that."

The colonel did not disclose the fact that it was no news to him. Aaron Grafton's statement was being unexpectedly confirmed. He remembered that Cynthia and Grafton had once been in love with each other.

"Well, when Cynthia came to me, in my capacity as lawyer as well as old friend, I could hardly believe what she told me about her husband," went on Kenneth. "She said he had struck her more than once, and she could stand it no longer.

"She wanted to apply for a divorce, but when I showed her that this would bring about much publicity, and necessitate taking testimony on both sides with possibly a long-dragged out case, she agreed merely to ask for a separation now, on

the accusation of cruel and inhuman treatment. On those grounds I went before the vice chancellor, prepared to prove my case by competent witnesses. But they were not needed."

"Why not?"

"Because Larch made no defense. He let the case go by default, for which I was glad, as it saved Cynthia from telling her story in open court. Larch, by refusing to appear, practically admitted the charges against him and did not oppose the separation.

"Then came the matter of alimony, or, rather, I should call it separate maintenance, as it is not alimony until a divorce is granted, and that has not yet been done, though we may apply for that later.

"I was prepared to ask the vice chancellor for a pretty stiff annual sum for my client, for I know Larch is rich, when, to my surprise, she would not permit it. She said if she left him it was for good and all, and that she wanted none of his bounty. She had some means of her own, she declared, and would work rather than accept a cent from him.

"So I had to let her have her way, and we did not ask the court for money, though I had no such squeamish feelings when it came to my counsel fee. I got that out of Larch rather than his wife."

"Did he pay it?"

"No; but he will, or I'll sue him and get judgment. Oh, he'll pay all right. He'll be so tickled to get out of paying his wife a monthly sum that he'll settle with me. But I can't understand her attitude any more than I can the change that came over him. For I really think he loved Cynthia once. She was a beautiful girl, and is still a handsome woman, though trouble has left its mark on her. Well, it's a queer world anyhow!"

"Isn't it?" agreed the colonel. "And it takes all sorts of persons to make it up. I'm sorry I can't offer any explanation as to why your client wouldn't accept money when she had a perfect right to it. However, as you won your case I suppose it doesn't so much matter."

"Not a great deal. Still I would like to know. There will be a sensation when this comes out."

And there was, when Daley, of the *Times,* scooped the other reporters and sprang his sensational story of the separation of the Larchs, the case having been heard in camera by the vice chancellor.

The murder of Mrs. Darcy had, some time ago, been shifted off the front page, though it would get back there when the young jeweler was tried. As for the killing of Shere Ali, that occasioned only passing interest, the murdered man not being well known.

But the separation of Mr. and Mrs. Larch was different. The finely appointed hotel kept by Larch, called the "Homestead," from the name of an old inn of Colonial days which it replaced, was known for miles around. It had a double reputation, so to speak. Though it had a grill, in which, nightly, there gathered such of the "sports" of Colchester as cared for that form of entertainment, the Homestead also catered to gatherings of a more refined nature. Grave, and even reverend, conventions assembled in its ball-room, and politicians of the upper, if not better, class were frequently seen in its dining-room or cafe. Being convenient to the courthouse, nearly all the judges and lawyers took lunch there. The place was also the scene of more or less important political dinners of the state, at which matters in no slight degree affecting national policies were often whipped into shape.

Larch himself was a peculiar character. In a smaller place he would have been called a saloon keeper. Going a little higher up the scale in population he might have been designated as a hotel proprietor. But in Colchester, which was rather unique among cities, he was looked up to as one of the substantial citizens of the place, for he owned the Homestead, where Washington, when it was a wayside inn, had stopped one night—at least such was the rumor—and families

socially prominent, some of whose members had very strong views on prohibition, did not hesitate to attend balls given at the hotel.

And it was this man, rich, it was said, handsome certainly, that Cynthia Ratchford had married. There had been other lovers whom she might have wedded, it was rumored, and more than one had remarked:

"Why did she take him?"

To this was the answer—whispered:

"Money!"

And, in a way, it was true. The family of Cynthia Larch—at least her mother—was socially ambitious, and she saw that if her daughter became the wife of Langford Larch his wealth, combined with her own family connections, would give her a chance not only to shine in the way she desired, but to eclipse some satellites who had outshone her in the social firmament. She also saw an opportunity of paying old debts and reaping some revenges.

All of this she had done, in a measure. After the marriage, which was a brilliant and gay one, if not happy, the Larch hotel—it could hardly be called a home—became the scene of many festive occasions. A number of entertainments were given, remarkable for the brilliant and effective dresses of the women, the multiplicity and richness of the food, and the variety of the wines.

Langford Larch could not himself be called a drinking man. Occasionally, as almost perforce he had to, he drank a little wine. But he was never noticeably drunk. Nor was that side of his business ever accentuated.

Gradually there had come about little whispers that Cynthia Larch had made a mistake in her marriage. There was little that was tangible—mere gossip—a hint that she would have been happier with some one else, though he had not so much money as had Larch.

The rumors floated about a bit, seemed to sink, and then started off at full steam just before the news of the separation became public. Then it was said of Larch that, soon after the echoes of the wedding chimes had died away, he had begun to treat his wife with refined cruelty—that hidden away from the public, underneath his habitual manner, there was the rawness of the brute.

But, for a time, the entertainments were kept up, and Cynthia, lovelier than ever, presided at her husband's table, graced it with her presence, and laughed and smiled at the men and women who came to partake of their lavish hospitality.

But it was noticed that the older and more conservative families were less often represented, and, when they were, it was by some of the younger members, whose reputations were already smirched

or who had not yet acquired any, and were willing to "take a chance."

And, also, old friends of Mrs. Larch observed that the smile did not long linger on her face. And that behind the laughter in her eyes was the shadow of a skeleton at the feast. Then came the legal separation and the parting. Mrs. Larch, resuming her maiden name, it was announced, had gone to a quiet place to rest.

To her few intimates it was known that Cynthia had gone to the little village of Pompey, where her father owned a small summer home. As for Larch, he met the various questions fired at him by his friends and others at the Homestead, as well as he was able. It was all due to a misunderstanding, he said.

That was before the whole story of his cruel treatment of his wife became known. For the papers of her testimony had been sealed, and it was only by a sharp trick on the part of Daley that he got access to them. Incidentally the vice chancelor was furious when it became known that the documents had been inspected by a reporter, but then it was too late.

The story spread over half the front page of the *Times,* and it was noted that the evening the paper came out a dinner which was to have been given by the Lawyers' Club at the Homestead was unexpectedly postponed.

"It wouldn't do, you know, after that story came out, for me and the vice chancellor who sat in the case, as well as other judges and members of the bar, to be seen there," Kenneth explained to the colonel.

Slowly and gradually, but none the less surely, a change came over the Homestead. The gathering of congenial spirits, who knew they would be undisturbed by a roistering element, grew less frequent in the grill and Tudor rooms. And it was whispered about:

"Larch is lushing!"

Meanwhile Colonel Ashley was a very busy man, and to no one did he tell very much about his activities. He saw Darcy frequently at the jail, and to that young man's pleadings that something be done, always returned the answer:

"Don't worry! It will come out all right!"

"But Amy—and the disgrace?"

"She doesn't consider herself disgraced, and you shouldn't. The best of police headquarters or prosecutor's detectives make mistakes. I'm going to rectify them. But it will take time."

"Do you know who killed my cousin?"

"I think I do."

"Then for the love of——"

"I can't tell you yet, Darcy. All in good time. I've got to be sure of my ground before I make too many moves. Oh, I know it's hard for you

to stay here, and hard to have the stigma attached to your name. It's hard for Miss Mason, too, although she's bearing up like a major. Gad, sir, that's what *she's* doing!

"You've got a friend in her of whom you may be proud. And her father, too—he's with you from the drop of the flag, he told me. Quite a racing man he is, a gentleman and a fine judge not only of whisky, which is good in its place, but of horses and men, too. Darcy, you've got good friends!"

"I know it, Colonel, and I count you among the best."

"Thanks. Then prove it by not asking me to play my hand before I have all the cards I want. All in good time. I'm working several ends, and they all must be fitted together, like the old jig-saw puzzle, before I can act. Besides, anything I could say now wouldn't set you free. You can't get out before a trial or before I can produce some one on whom I can actually fasten the murder. And I can't do that yet. You aren't the only suspect, though. There's Harry King, still locked up——"

"No, he isn't, Colonel."

"He isn't?" cried the old detective, and there was surprise in his voice.

"No. He was bailed out to-day. I thought you knew it."

"I didn't. I'm glad you told me, though. So King got bail! Who put it up? It was high!"

"Larch!"

"The hotel keeper?"

"So I understand. They took Harry away a while ago. I wish I had been in his shoes."

"I'm glad you're not. I don't imagine, for a moment, that fool King had a hand in this affair. In fact I know he didn't. But his are pretty uncertain shoes to be in just the same. Now cheer up! This setting him free on bail has given me a new angle to work on. So cheer up, and I'll do the best I can for you. Any message you want to send to Miss Mason?"

"Only that I—" Darcy hesitated and grew red.

"I guess I understand," said the colonel with a laugh. "I'll tell her!"

The colonel spent that evening in the grill room of the Homestead. Though it was not the same as it had been, and though patronage of the better sort had fallen off considerably, it was still a jolly enough sort of place of its character to be in. A number of "men about town," as they liked to be called, were in, and Colonel Ashley was sipping his julep when there entered Mr. Kettridge, the relative of Mrs. Darcy, whose jewelry shop he was managing pending a settlement of her estate.

"Good evening, Colonel," he called genially. "Will you join me in a Welsh rabbit?"

"Thank you, no. I'm afraid my digestion isn't quite up to that, as I've had to cut out my fishing of late. But what do you say to a julep?"

"Delighted, I'm sure," and they sat down at one of the half-enclosed tables in the grill and ordered food and drink. They had become friends since the colonel's first visit to the store, and the friendship had grown as they found they had congenial tastes.

The evening passed pleasantly for them. They talked of much, including the murder, and the colonel was more than pleased to find that the jeweler had no very strong suspicion against young Darcy.

"I've known him from a boy," said Mr. Kettridge, "and, though he has his faults, a crime such as this would be almost impossible to him, no matter what motive, such as the dispute over money or his sweetheart. He may be guilty, but I doubt it."

"My idea, exactly," returned the colonel. "Now as to certain matters in the store on the morning of the murder. The stopped clocks, for instance. Have you any theory——"

Came, at that instant, fairly bursting into the quiet grill room, some "jolly good fellows," to take them at their own valuation. There were three of them, the center figure being that of Harry King, and he was very much intoxicated.

"Hello, Harry! Where have you been?" some one called.

King regarded his questioner gravely, as though deeply pondering over the matter. It was often characteristic of him that, though he became very much intoxicated, yet, at times, under such conditions, Harry King's language approached the cultured, rather than degenerated into the common talk of the ordinary drunk. That is not always, but sometimes. It happened to be so now.

"I beg your pardon?" he said, in the cultured tones he knew so well how to use, yet of which he made so little use of late.

"I said, where have you been?" remarked the other. "We've missed you."

"I have been spending a week end in the country," King remarked, with biting sarcasm. "Found I was getting a bit stale in my golf, don't you know—" there was a momentary pause while he regained the use of his treacherous tongue, then he went on—"I caught myself foozling a few putts, and I concluded I needed to work back up to form."

There was a laugh at this, for scarcely one in the gilded grill but knew where King had been, and whither he was going. But the laugh was instantly hushed at the look that flashed from his eyes toward those who had indulged in the mirth.

King had a nasty temper that grew worse with his indulgence in drink, and it was clear that he had been indulging and intended to continue.

"I said I was—*golfing,*" he went on, exceedingly distinctly, though with an effort. "And now, Cal," and he nodded patronizingly to the white-aproned and respectful bartender, "will you be kind enough to see what my friends will be pleased to order that they may pour out a libation to —let us say Polonius!"

"Why Polonius?" some one asked.

"Because, dear friend," replied King softly, "he somewhat resembles a certain person here, who talks too much, but who is not so wise as he thinks. And now—" he raised his glass—"to all the gods that on Olympus dwell!"

And they drank with him.

Nodding and smiling at his friends, who thronged about him, standing under the gay lights which reflected from costly oil paintings, Harry King plunged his hand into his pocket to pay the bill, a check for which the bartender had thrust toward him.

"Gad, but he's got a wad!" somebody whispered, as King pulled forth a great roll of bills, together with a number of gold and silver coins.

There was a rattle of coins on the mahogany bar as King sought to disentangle a single bill from the wadded-up currency in his pocket.

Some coins fell to the floor and rolled in the direction of the table whereat sat the colonel and Mr. Kettridge. The latter, with a pitying smile on his face, leaned over to pick them up. As he did so, and brought a piece of money up into the light, a curious look came over his face. He stared at the coin.

"What is it?" asked Coloney Ashley, noting the unusual look.

"It's—it's an odd coin—an old Roman one—that Mrs. Darcy had in her private collection, kept in the jewelry store safe," was the whispered answer. "I went over them the other day and noticed some were missing, though I saw them all when I paid a visit to her just a short time before she was killed."

"Was this odd coin in her collection?" asked the colonel, as he looked at the piece which Kettridge handed him. It was of considerable value to a collector.

"That was hers," went on the jeweler. "It must have been taken from her safe, for she had refused many offers to sell it. And now—"

"Now Harry King has it!" exclaimed Colonel Ashley. "I think this will bear looking into!"

CHAPTER XIII

SINGA PHUT

Mr. Kettridge, his eyes big with unconcealed wonder as he looked at the odd coin, was eager to accost Harry King at once and demand to know whence the roysterer had obtained it. In fact, the jeweler half arose from his chair, to approach the three swaggering men in the cafe section of the grill, when Colonel Ashley laid a restraining hand on the shoulder of his new friend.

"It won't do now," he said gently.

"Why not? I've got to find out how he came by that coin! It's a rare and valuable one I tell you. It's worth all of a thousand dollars to a collector. Lots of them would be glad to pay more. It's catalogue price is a thousand. And now this drunken fool has it! He must—Colonel, don't you see what this means?"

"Yes, Mr. Kettridge, I can very easily see what it *might* mean. But King is in no condition now to approach on such a subject. There is a saying that when the wine is in the wit is out, and it is generally held, by some detectives,

that then is the proper time to approach a subject for information that would otherwise be withheld. But King is in a sarcastic mood now, and sufficiently able to take care of himself to be very suspicious if we began to question him, even under the guise of friendship."

"I suppose so," agreed the jeweler, "and yet——"

"Oh, I wish I hadn't got into this!" suddenly exclaimed Colonel Ashley, with almost a despairing gesture. "I started out for some quiet fishing, which I very much needed, for I am getting too old for this sort of thing. I ought never to have undertaken it! I'm almost resolved to give it up. I believe I will!" he said suddenly, slapping his hand on the table, at the sound of which a waiter hurried up.

"No—nothing now," went on the colonel, waving the man away. "Yes, I'll give this case up!" he went on, with a sigh. "In the morning I'll get Shag to lay out my rods and we'll go fishing. I was foolish to let myself be dragged into this. It would have been all right five years ago. But now—well, I'm through—that's all!"

Mr. Kettridge regarded his companion with amazement.

"But what can we do without you?" he asked.

"Oh, I'll send you one of my best men," was the answer. "I'll wire for Kedge. You can rely

on him. He's solved more cases like this than I can remember. Yes, I'll send for Kedge. This is no place for me. I'm too old."

"Too old, Colonel?"

"Yes, too old! And I've grown too fond of fishing. Yes, I'll let Kedge finish this up. And yet——"

The detective seemed to muse for a moment. Then he went on, half murmuring to himself.

"No, hang it all! Kedge has that bank case to look after. Anyhow, I don't believe he'd figure this out right. Oh, well, I suppose there's no help for it. I've got to keep on now that I've started. But it's my last case! Positively my last case!" and once more he banged his hand down on the table.

Again the waiter glided up. He looked at the colonel expectantly, and the latter stared at him uncomprehendingly for a moment.

"Oh, yes," went on the detective. "You may bring me—er—just a small glass of claret—a very small one."

Mr. Kettridge gave his order, and then looked relieved. The colonel had seemed very much in earnest.

"Do you suppose," asked the jeweler, "that Harry King could have had anything to do with this case?"

"Of course it's possible, but, even so, we can

easily make sure of him and arrest him when we want him. To approach him now would only be to defeat your own plan, that is if you have one. I confess this startles me. I don't know what to make of it, and there's no use pretending that I do. After all, detective work is the outcome of common sense plus a sort of special intuition and knowledge. I have gotten to a certain point, and now some of my theories are shattered. That is they would be if I had been foolish enough to have formed arbitrary theories that could not be changed. As it is, that's just what I have not done. I am still open to argument and conviction, and this coin, which you say belonged to Mrs. Darcy a few days before her death, and which now makes its appearance in the hands of a drunken man who has been under suspicion, makes cause for question.

"But, my dear Mr. Kettridge, let us be reasonable. King will not run away, and in his present condition he is likely to pick a quarrel with you if you mention the murder to him. Consider, also, that it may be he came into possession of this coin honestly."

"How?"

"He may have received it in change—here. He's spent enough money in the place I suppose."

"But if he got it here— Great Scott! you don't suppose that Larch—"

"I don't suppose anything yet, least of all regarding Larch. But consider. This is a public place. A hundred persons—yes, two or three hundred —come in here every day, spend money and receive change. Now this coin, though to you and me it shows itself at once to be of great antiquity, might easily be passed, in a hurry, or to one who had not the full possession of his senses, as a silver half dollar, which it somewhat resembles. In fact, I think I can persuade King that it *was* a half dollar he dropped."

And, somewhat to the surprise of Mr. Kettridge, the colonel, who had been watching King as the latter sought on the floor for his fallen coins, walked up to the wastral and handed him a fifty-cent piece.

"You dropped that, I believe," said Colonel Ashley, genially enough.

"Thanks, old top! Perhaps I did. Have a drink?"

"No, thank you!"

With a friendly wave of his hand to the colonel, King slipped the half dollar into his pocket with other loose change and turned to the glass that awaited him.

"You see," said the colonel to Mr. Kettridge. "He doesn't know he had it—he doesn't know he lost it—he doesn't know you have it. Keep it, I beg of you. We may need it."

"But suppose King goes away?"

"He won't. I'll take care of that. I'll telegraph for one of my best men. I have a little more than I can look after personally."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Have King kept in sight. There are some others in this city I need to shadow."

"You don't mean Singa Phut?"

"No, he's in custody. Besides, I've—Well, I guess I won't say what conclusion I've come to regarding him. I might have to change it. He is an interesting study. I haven't yet found a motive for his killing of his partner—if he did it."

"Who else could?"

"There might be many. Just as there might be many ways to account for King's having possession of this coin. He may have come by it in a way that is easily explained, and if we, inferentially, accused him there would be trouble."

"I suppose so. Well, Colonel Ashley, I'll leave the case in your hands. God knows, for the sake of the family name, I'd like to see Darcy cleared. I don't believe he did it. Here, you keep this coin," for the detective had offered it to his companion. "You may need it."

"Yes. I may. And so it is worth a thousand dollars," mused the colonel. "Just about the sum Darcy claimed from his cousin. I won-

der—Oh, but what's the use of wondering? I must make *certain,"* and he put the old Roman coin safely away in his wallet.

The colonel and his friend finished their modest meal, and their more modest potations, of no very strong liquids, and went out, leaving Harry King and his companions to "make a night of it."

Larch, whose face was unusually flushed, was endeavoring to bring the young men to a less boisterous state, for he realized that his better class of patrons did not like this sort of thing.

But King was in jubilant mood. He had been released, under heavy bail, it is true, when the hotel keeper gave a pledge for the appearance of the young man when he was wanted. Harry was only held as a witness, so far, but an important one, and because of his known characteristic of suddenly disappearing at times a heavy bond had been required.

Why Larch had gone on this bond did not make itself clear to Colonel Ashley, and he set that down in his little red note book as one of the matters needing to be cleared up.

And so, wondering much, the colonel and Mr. Kettridge, the former with the rare coin, went out into the cool and star-lit night, leaving behind them the sounds of good-fellowship, of that particular brand, in the Homestead.

One of the first places the colonel visited the

next day was the jewelry shop. Matters there had nearly assumed their normal aspect. Trade was about the same, under the skilful management of Mr. Kettridge, and the cut glass and silver gleamed and glistened in the showcases as though the former owner of it all had not been cruelly slain.

"Show you her collection of coins? Certainly," agreed Mr. Kettridge, when the colonel told what he wanted. "As I said, I saw them, and particularly the one we picked up last night, in her safe a week or so before she was killed. I was on for a visit. And I know that a week previous to that she had refused a thousand dollars for this particular one. These coins were one of her hobbies," and he brought from the safe the collection, which was of considerable value to a numismatist.

"There seem to be others besides the Roman coin gone," said the jeweler, "for I now miss many I used to see in her case. But, of course, she may have sold them. I do remember the one King had, though, and I'm sure she never sold that. It was taken close to the time she was killed."

Colonel Ashley, taking advantage of the time when the store was closed for the night, minutely examined the safe, but could find no evidence of its having been tampered with.

"For what started out to be a simple murder case," mused the old detective, as he went back to his hotel that night, "this one bids fair to become quite complicated."

An impulse—it was hardly more than that, and yet it had to do with the matter in hand—sent the detective to police headquarters.

"I think I'll ask Donovan what Singa Phut said when he was arrested and charged with murdering his partner," said the colonel to himself. "There's an end I haven't developed very much. And I would like to ask that East Indian something about that queer watch."

Donovan was at headquarters, it being his night "on," and he welcomed the detective as some one with whom he might hold converse.

"Have a talk with Singa Phut? Why sure, if it will do you any good," said the headquarters man when the colonel had made known his desire. "I was going to the jail on another matter, anyhow, and I might as well kill two birds as one. They'll let you see him if I'm with you. Otherwise you'd have to get an order from the prosecutor's office. Come along."

It was raining when they reached the jail, and the colonel, as he heard the patter of drops, thought of the night he had first come to Colchester.

"There ought to be good fishing after this

rain," said the colonel, with a regretful sigh as he thought of his rods and flies.

"Fishin'!" exclaimed Donovan. "Say, that's something I haven't done since I was a kid! I used to like it, though. Well, here we are! Looks like a party. What d'you s'pose the warden's all lit up for?"

Certainly the gloomy jail was more brightly lighted than usual at night, for the prisoners were locked in their cells and all illumination, save the keepers' lights, put out at nine o'clock.

"We want to see that Dago, you know—Singa Phut," said Donovan, as he nodded to the deputy warden who answered their ring at the steel side door.

"Humph! Little too late," was the answer.

"Too late! What d'you mean? He's gone?"

"That's it."

"On bail? No, it couldn't be with a murder charge!" expostulated Donovan. "He can't be out! You're kiddin'!"

"He's croaked!" answered the deputy warden. "We found him dead in his cell half an hour ago."

CHAPTER XIV

THE HIDDEN WIRES

DONOVAN looked at the deputy as if about to dispute the statement. The detective even opened his lips to speak, but no sound came through them. Donovan sat down in a chair.

"Do you mean—" he asked, passing his hand over his face, as though to brush away unseen cobwebs. "Do you mean that he's *dead?*"

"Sure," was the answer. "Croaked, I told you. Deader 'n a burned out cigarette."

"Well," observed Donovan dispassionately, "that's the limit!"

"I agree with you," said the colonel, and there was a curious look on his face. "Though if you mean it's the *end* I beg to differ. It's only the *beginning.*"

"How'd it happen?" asked Donovan sharply.

"We don't know," was the answer. "The Dago was all right to-day, except he seemed a little glummer than usual. He didn't eat any supper though, but that's nothing. Lots of times the birds in here get off their feed," and the deputy warden made a comprehensive gesture.

"He was locked up with the rest to-night and we got sort of quiet and comfortable here and I was having a game of pinochle with Tom Doyle when one of our boarders in murderers' row let's out a howl. Course I went to see what it was, and there was the Dago—croaked!"

"What did it?" asked Donovan.

"We don't know. Doc Warren's in now giving him the once-over."

"Did he have any visitors to-day?" asked the colonel.

"Yes, a fellow like himself—Indian I reckon. But we didn't let him further than the corridor. It wasn't visiting day for the fellows in his row, so the Dago left a package and went away."

"What was in the package?" the colonel questioned further.

"Oh, just some cigarettes. Singa Phut didn't like the kind we keep, and he had to have his own fancy kind. He's had 'em before, so we knew they was all right."

"Was that all?"

"Every blessed thing that was in the package. So we let him have the cigarettes. That was about four o'clock. He was dead at eight. Here comes the doctor now. Maybe he can tell you something."

Doctor Warren, rubbing his hands to get rid of the lint from the warden's towel, came along

settling himself into his coat which he had removed the better to examine the body of the East Indian.

"Well, Donovan," said the county physician. "your friend saved you the trouble of convicting him."

"Yep. But I'd a had him all right. I'd a sent him to the chair without any trouble. But what ailed him, Doc?"

"I can't say yet. Looks like a case of heart disease. I'll hold an autopsy in the morning. He's dead all right."

"I thought maybe some of the other prisoners might have got in and croaked him," commented the headquarters detective. "Riley was saying some one let out a yell."

"That was Schmidt—fellow that killed his wife," interposed the deputy warden. "He's in the cell next to where the Dago was. Schmidt said he heard the foreigner breathing awful funny. It was his last breath all right. He was dead when I got in, Doc."

"Yes, they go quick that way."

"Are you sure it was heart disease, Dr. Warren?" asked the colonel.

"No, not at all. I just mentioned that as most probable. He didn't look strong. I can't tell for a certainty until to-morrow."

"Pardon me, Dr. Warren, for presuming on

what is particularly your own ground, but did you look to see if any of the cigarettes were left in his cell?"

"I didn't notice. If you want to take a look come on back. And I don't in the least mind any suggestions from you, Colonel. I'm too much interested in your work. In fact, I'd be glad to have you help in this investigation if you think there's anything crooked."

"Oh, not at all. Suicide is, of course, the most natural suspicion in a case like this, and it isn't hard to conceal enough opium in a cigarette to kill a dozen men."

"Blazes! I never thought of that!" ejaculated the deputy. "Come on!" and he led the way back to the cell.

Singa Phut's body had been removed to another part of the jail. But the cell was as it had been when the final summons came to the East Indian.

There were the few poor possessions he had been allowed to have with him—simple and apparently safe enough. And, scattered on the floor, were some of the cigarettes, made from strong Latakia tobacco, the peculiar ordor of which was, even yet, noticeable in the corners of the cell.

"He smoked some of 'em all right," observed the deputy.

"Let's have a look," suggested the colonel. "If

we had a better light in here it might help."

"I'll bring one of the two-hundred watt bulbs we use down in the office," said the warden, who had joined the little group. There was an electric light socket in each cell—recently installed as the result of the agitation of a prison reform committee. The low-powered bulb was taken out and the glaring nitrogen gas one substituted. It made the cell very bright, and by the glare the colonel gathered up a number of the cigarettes. Some had been smoked down to a mere stub; others had not been lighted, and two or three were broken in half, neither end showing signs of either having been scorched by a match or wet by the lips of Singa Phut.

"Queer he'd waste 'em that way," observed Donovan. "Usually they can't get enough to smoke."

"He didn't exactly waste them," said the colonel grimly, as he looked at the divided but otherwise perfect cigarettes in his hand.

"What do you call it then?" demanded the headquarters detective.

"Well, I think he was looking for something in the cigarettes—and—he found it."

"What do you mean?" asked Dr. Warren.

"Wait. Maybe I can show you."

Colonel Ashley carefully gathered up all the cigarettes in the cell, a number of them being

perfect. With them, and the black butts, as well as the broken paper tubes, he moved over to the small table in the cell, and spread them out.

Donovan reached under the colonel's arm and broke open one of the whole cigarettes. "I don't see—" he began. "For the love of Mike look at this!" he suddenly exclaimed. "There's a needle in this dope stick!"

"And, if you value your life don't touch it!" cried the colonel. "That's what I was looking for! Don't so much as scratch yourself the hundredth part of an inch or— Well, you saw Singa Phut," he ended grimly.

"Poisoned needle, Colonel?" asked Dr. Warren, as he shoved the cigarette Donovan had broken toward the middle of the table.

"That's what I suspect. If we had a cat now or a rat—"

"Easy enough to get a rat," interposed the warden. "There's always some of the beasts in the traps we set about. We catch 'em alive. I don't like poison. Here, Riley, go and see if you can find a rat in one of the traps. What you going to do, Colonel? Try it on him?"

"If you have one, yes. You get my idea, I guess. Some one of Singa Phut's Indian friends, knowing he would rather go out this way than pay the penalty of his crime, brought in a package of his favorite cigarettes.

"In two, three, or in perhaps more of the 'dope sticks,' as my friend Donovan calls them, he shoved a fine needle, the tip of which was dipped in some swift, subtle Indian poison, the secret of which these two alone, perhaps, knew.

"With the cigarettes in his possession it was easy enough for Singa Phut to smoke some and extract a needle from another. It was probably marked in some secret way. More than one needle was sent to guard against failure. But the first one must have worked. I'd like to find it."

"I'll have the cell swept for you," promised the warden as his deputy went off to look for a rat. A keeper was summoned with a broom, and brushed out the cell. It did not take long, for it was very clean. Most of the debris was cigarette ash and scraps of paper and tobacco. And it was in this debris, carefully poked over with a lead pencil, that a needle was found.

Colonel Ashley, using extreme care, laid the two together, after an examination of the other unbroken cigarettes had disclosed the fact that none of them concealed anything.

"I got one, Warden! A beaut!" came Riley's voice from down the corridor, and he came in with a wire cage containing a large rat which cowered in one corner of his cell, even as Singa Phut had shrunk into his when the end came.

"How you going to get at him, Colonel?" asked

the warden. "They're nasty to handle. One of 'em niped my dog fierce when I gave him a chance at killing it a day or so ago."

"I'm not going to let it out. If I had a stick, or something that I could fasten the needle on, I could work a sort of javelin," remarked the colonel.

"I'll get you one," offered Riley, much interested in the coming experiment. Donovan, too, looked on in startled wonder.

A long, slender stick was brought and, using great care, with his rubber gloves on that he used in autopsies, Doctor Warren fastened the needle to the wand. Then Colonel Ashley thrust the improvised spear through the wires of the cage and lightly punctured the rat, which gave a protesting squeak.

"It didn't hurt him much," observed the colonel, "and, if I have guessed right, his death will be painless."

"How soon?" asked Donovan.

"I can't say, but it ought not be very long. The kind of poison they use is calculated to work swiftly."

In the glaring light from the nitrogen bulb they stood in the cell of the dead man, gathered about the cage of the rat—a prison within a prison. After the first start caused by the needle prick, the rodent again shrank back into its

corner. For perhaps ten minutes it remained thus, and then it began to exhibit signs of uneasiness. It stood up on its haunches and began to bite at the wires of the cage. It squeaked, more as though uneasy than in pain.

In another minute it began to run around the tin floor of its prison, and then it suddenly stopped in its tracks, fell over in a lump and was still.

"Well, I'll be——" began Donovan, and then, with a look at the colonel, he substituted: "This gets me! It sure does!"

"It evidently went right to the heart, just as in Singa Phut's case," observed the colonel grimly.

"You were right," said Doctor Warren, "it was poison. He probably jabbed himself with the point of the needle, and whatever was smeared on it did the rest. I shall be interested in making the autopsy."

"You will probably find very little trace of the poison," said the colonel. "The kind they use is designed to disappear almost as soon as it becomes effective. Still you may discover something."

But Doctor Warren did not. Aside from a little scratch near the prisoner's heart, where he had evidently dug the needle deep into his skin, there was no sign that death was other than by

natural causes. The poison had gone directly into the blood, as does the venom of a snake, and had brought death in the same way. In fact, it was the opinion of Colonel Ashley that some form of snake poison was used, though what it was, no one could say.

And so passed out and beyond Singa Phut, and the charge of murder, having been quashed by a higher tribunal than that of the county court, the matter was soon forgotten.

The colonel's theory, that some fellow countryman had supplied the East Indian means of escaping the electric chair, was generally accepted. And that Singa Phut was guilty of having killed his partner in a sudden fit of passion following one of their frequent quarrels was also believed by those who cared to exercise any thought in the matter.

"But what gets me, though," said the colonel, "is where does Singa Phut fit in with the watch in Mrs. Darcy's hand. That watch! Ah, there's a link I haven't had time to examine as I'd like to. I must see to it."

The colonel fell into a reverie. His eyes went to the closet where he had put away his fishing rods.

"Oh, friend Izaak!" he murmured. "How basely I have deserted you! But I'm coming back. Yes, I'll stop this detective work. I'll

wire for Kedge to-night to come on and take up the case. He can do it as well as I. I'll get Kedge!"

He started for the telephone to dictate a telegram. And then, as he chanced to look out of the window, a different expression came into his face.

Down on the sidewalk he saw Amy Mason walking slowly along. The girl's pretty face was drawn and careworn. Evidently the anxiety over Darcy was beginning to tell on her.

The old detective shook his head slowly.

"Oh, I suppose I can't back out now," he sighed. "I've gone too far. It would look like quitting, and I never was a quitter!"

He straightened up to his soldierly height.

"Besides," he went on, "Kedge would only mix matters up now. He wouldn't know what to do, even if I told him. Kedge is all right for some things, but—— Oh, well, I'll keep on with the case!"

This was the day following the discovery of the suicide of the East Indian in his cell, and any intentions Colonel Ashley may have had of subjecting to a close examination the queer watch had to be postponed.

He had ventured to keep it after Donovan had shown it to him, ready to make some plausible excuse if it was called for, but the arrest of the

East Indian, and the preparation of the case for trial, in connection with the prosecutor's office, evidently made Donovan forget, for the time being, that the watch was not among other criminal relics in his closet.

As a matter of fact, Colonel Ashley had had it in his possession since that night Donovan went out with his friend, the stool pigeon. And now, carrying out a plan he had made, the colonel, one bright May morning, put the odd timepiece in his pocket and started for the Darcy jewelry store, intending to have Kettridge look at the mechanism and other parts of the watch.

But when the detective reached the establishment he saw, to his surprise, a great crowd gathered out in front—a crowd that needed the services of several policemen to keep it from stopping traffic in the roadway.

"Hello! More trouble at the place," mused the colonel, quickening his steps. "I wonder what's up this time?"

He inquired casually from those on the outskirts of the throng, and received enough information to justify the getting out of several extra newspapers.

"Burglar tried to blow up the safe and got blowed up himself."

"Hold-up man shot three of the girls behind the diamond counter and then killed himself."

"Naw! Somebody tried to set fire to the place!"

"Aw, only one of the girls fainted; that's all."

These opinions came mostly from boys or young men. No one seemed to know exactly what had happened. The colonel spied Mulligan, the officer who had been the first official on the scene at the murder of Mrs. Darcy, and nodded in friendly fashion. The bluecoat escorted the colonel through the crowd into the store.

"I guess you'll be interested," said Mulligan.

"Yes, thank you. What is it?"

"I didn't hear all the particulars. But Miss Brill, the young lady clerk, received an electrical shock from some wires hidden under the metal edge of one of the showcases, so Mr. Kettridge says, and she was knocked down."

"Killed?"

"No, but her head struck on the edge of a case and she's badly cut. I sent for the ambulance. It happened when the store was crowded and made a bit of excitement."

"I should think it would! Hidden electric wires!" and the colonel thought of a certain discovery he had made.

CHAPTER XV

A DOG

WITH the help of the police, and when the stricken, though not dangerously injured, girl had been taken away in the ambulance, the crowd was dispersed. It was then Colonel Ashley had a chance to speak to Mr. Kettridge.

"What's all this I hear?" asked the detective.

"I don't know," and the manager smiled wearily. "If you heard all of the rumors I did they would include everything from an I.W.W.plot to a combined attack by New York gunmen."

"But what was it?"

"Well, one of our clerks, Miss Brill, was waiting on a customer at one of the silver showcases. They are arranged with electric lights inside that may be switched on when needed.

"She turned on the current to illuminate the inside of the case, so that her customer might make a selection to have spread out on top, when, in some manner, Miss Brill received a severe electrical shock. She was thrown backward to the floor, and her head struck a projecting corner of one of the rear showcases. She was badly cut,

but the hospital doctor said there was no fracture."

"Did she get shocked from the wires that run into the interior of the case?" asked the detective.

"No, and that's the queer part of it," said the manager. "She was shocked while leaning against the silvered, metal edge of the glass case, and, on examination, I find some hidden electrical wires there—wires that must, in some way, have become crossed on the lighting circuit. I didn't know the wires were there."

"I did," said the colonel, quietly.

"You did?"

"Yes, when I tested them with an instrument I secured from an electrician here in town the wires were dead. There was not the slightest current in them. Either they have been changed lately, or some sudden jar or misplacement brought them in contact with a live circuit."

"What were the wires for?" asked Mr. Kettridge.

"That's what I've been wanting to find out. Originally I think they were for some system of burglar alarm installed by Mrs. Darcy. But now those wires run to the work bench that was used by James Darcy."

"To his work bench?" The manager was obviously startled.

"Yes. But don't jump at conclusions. You

know he was working on an electric lathe he hoped to patent. Those wires may be merely part of his equipment."

"Yes, and they may—wait a minute!" suddenly exclaimed the manager. "I wonder——"

From his private office, into which he had ushered the colonel, he looked down the store. It was almost deserted now, save for a few customers and the clerks.

"It's the same place!" murmured the manager.

"What is?" asked the detective.

"Miss Brill was shocked, and fell at the very spot where the dead body of Mrs. Darcy was found!" said Mr. Kettridge in a low, intense voice. "Except for the fact that she fell behind the showcase and Mrs. Darcy in front of it, the place is the same!"

With a muttered exclamation the colonel got to his feet and also looked out from the private office.

"You're right," he admitted. "I wonder if that is a coincidence or—something else. I must go to see Darcy."

The prisoner was measurably startled when the detective told him the latest development at the jewelry store.

"Those were never my wires in the showcase!" cried the young man. "I knew some were there, for we did have an antiquated burglar alarm sys-

tem when I first came to work for my 'cousin. I had another one put in, and I supposed they had ripped out the old wires. But the wires I used for my lathe experiments had no connection with those, I'm sure. What is your theory?"

"I have so many I don't know at which one to begin," admitted Colonel Ashley. "But I was wondering if it was possible that the showcase wires, which when I tested them were dead, could have, in some manner, become charged, and have given Mrs. Darcy a shock that might have sent her reeling to the floor, toppling the heavy statue over on her head, and so killing her."

"By *accident* do you mean?" asked Darcy, his face lighting up with hope.

"Yes. This young lady received a severe blow on her head by her fall, and your cousin—"

"You forget the stab wound, Colonel."

"No, I didn't exactly *forget* it. I was wondering how we could account for that if we accepted the shock theory. I guess we can't. I'm still up against it. I've struck a snag—maybe a stone wall, Darcy!"

"Do you—do you think you can get over it, Colonel?"

"By gad, sir! I will! That's all there is to it! *I will!*"

The silence of the colonel's room was broken

by a peculiar scratching at the door, interrupting his perusal of this passage:

"I told you angling is an art, either by practice or long observation or both. But take this for a rule—"

"Come in!" invited the colonel, thinking it might be Shag, who sometimes, for the lesser disturbance of his master's thoughts or reading, thus announced himself.

But there entered no black and smiling Shag, nor one of the hotel employees, but a little dog which wagged its tail both in greeting to the colonel, seated before a gas log in his room, and also as a sort of applause for the dog itself, because it had succeeded in pushing open the door which was left ajar, but which, nevertheless, was rather stiff on the hinges. And Chet, the dog in question, was rather proud of his achievement. Thus his wagged tail had a double meaning, so to speak.

"Ah, Chet, you've come in for another talk, have you?" asked the colonel as he leaned over to pat the dog's head.

More wagging of the tail to indicate pleasure, satisfaction, and whatever else dogs thus express.

"Glad to see you," went on the colonel, as though talking to a human, and, with more gyrations of the tail, which constituted Chet's side of the talk with the colonel, the little creature sought

a warm spot near the gas log, stretched out and sighed long in contentment.

Chet was the pet of a man—a permanent resident of the hotel—who had the suite next Colonel Ashley's, and, early in his stay at the hostelry, the detective had made friends with the little animal, which, when Mr. Bland, its own master, was out, often came in to visit the fisherman, just as he had done now.

The colonel was thoroughly enjoying himself, for he had put aside, in the perusal of Walton, all thoughts of the murder and its many complications, when there came another interruption. This time it was a ring of his room telephone.

There's a gentleman downstairs asking for you," came the word in response to his answer to the summons.

"Who is it?

"Says I'm to tell you he's Mr. Young."

"Oh, yes, Jack Young—send him up." The colonel closed the book with a sigh of regret.

"No use trying to read Izaak now," he murmured. "It would be a sacrilege. I'll have to wait a bit. Wonder what Jack wants. Ah, come in!" he called, as a discreet knock sounded on the half-opened door. "Trouble?"

"Not yet, Colonel, though there may be. Do you want me to follow King out of town?"

"Of course. Wherever he goes. Stick to him

like a leech," and the detective indicated a chair to his visitor. Jack Young was one of the Ashley Agency's most trusted lieutenants.

"I sent for you to have you shadow King," said the detective in a low voice, seeing to it that the door was closed, "because I think we can get something out of him."

"Not a confession, surely!" exclaimed Young.

"Well, if he gets drunk enough, yes. But not the kind of confession that would be any use to us. What a man babbles when the wine is in and the wit is out, wouldn't be much use in a court of law. But if you can get him to tell anything about where he got that queer coin—the one that used to be in Mrs. Darcy's collection—so much to the good. But be foxy about it, Jack."

"I will! What I came to see about is whether you want me to follow him out of town. He's been cutting a pretty wide swath since he got out on bail, and he's been having some pretty sporty times."

"And you've been with him; is that it?"

"To the best of my ability, yes," admitted Jack, as he patted Chet, when the dog, that evidently had met him before, slid over to have his ears pulled.

"I have great faith in your ability, Jack. The point is to stick to King. You managed to make friends with him?"

"That wasn't hard. But I'll need a little money if I'm to keep up his pace. That's why I came to you."

"Perfectly right, Jack. Mason so thoroughly believes in the innocence of Darcy, and he sticks by his daughter's engagement so well, that he'd supply twice as much cash as was necessary to sift this to the bottom. So here's some to enable you to keep up to King's pace."

"Of course it's none of my business, Colonel, but I'd like to know a little bit about how the wind blows. Do you really suspect him of the murder?"

"Jack, I don't know!" was the frank answer, as Chet went back to his place by the gas log. "His having that odd coin was what put me on his trail again, and I sent for you to shadow him, as I had too many other irons in the fire. And you've done well. I guess there isn't much that Harry has done since that night about a week ago, when I saw him in the Homestead, that you don't know about."

"I guess not, Colonel."

"But, with it all, I'm not much nearer than I was at first."

"How about Spotty?"

"He won't say a word."

"You tried the third degree on him, of course?"

"I—er—I did and I didn't," the colonel an-

swered, lamely. "You see, you can't go too far with a man when he has saved your life."

"But he may know all about it."

"Possibly."

"How about young Darcy?"

The colonel did not answer at once. It was not until he had gone to a closet and taken from it a package which he placed on a tabarette, on which, near him, rested a box of cigars, that he spoke. Then he said:

"If I could find out why Singa Phut used this watch I'd be in a better position to answer," and from the package the detective took the timepiece which he had kept after Donovan had given it to him to examine.

"You mean you're not sure about Darcy?"

"Well, I thought I was. At first I had my doubts. Then, when I had looked over the ground and talked with Miss Mason and him, I was willing to take up his case just because I believed he had nothing to do with the murder."

The colonel, who had taken the watch from some tissue paper in which it was wrapped, laid it down on the low stool, and turned his attention to his visitor. Chet with a whine and stretch, indicating that he was warmed and rested, and would not object to a little play, walked slowly over toward the colonel.

"But," went on the detective, "since the finding

of the electric wires running to Darcy's desk—Jack, I tell you what it is. You helped me out wonderfully on that robbery of the Chatham bank, when the cashier ran some wires to the time lock and had it open five hours ahead of time, I wish you'd come and have a look at those wires with me. Maybe you could give me a hint that would clear up some of the doubt I have regarding Darcy."

"All right, Colonel, I'll come. But I think I'd better follow King now. He's got a date with Larch, the hotel keeper, and there may be something in it."

"Oh, go by all means! The wires will keep. Here, I'll give you an idea about how they run," and the colonel drew a sort of diagram of the jewelry store, indicating the showcase where the hidden wires had been found, explaining to his man the effect on the young woman clerk who had been shocked.

Jack Young studied the diagram carefully and shook his head. The colonel, meanwhile, sat back and waited. Chet was worrying the tissue paper in which the Indian's watch was wrapped.

"Well, Colonel, I'll tell you what it is," said Jack, after a series of questions, "I'd have to see the place to get at any right idea of it. Not to cast any aspersions on your ability as an artist, I can't just make out how the wires run, from this

sketch," and he smiled, after having studied the drawings for perhaps ten minutes.

"Don't blame you a bit!" laughed the colonel. "I never was much on pencil work. But now you follow Harry King. If you need more money, come to me," he added as he handed over a roll of bills. "And then we'll have to go at those wires. I'm not so sure—"

The colonel's remarks were interrupted by peculiar actions on the part of Chet. The little animal appeared to have gotten something into his mouth which bothered him. He was whining and pawing at his jaws.

"Look at the dog, Colonel!" exclaimed Jack. "Look!"

"Gad! he's got hold of the Indian's watch!" cried the detective. "He's been worrying it as he would a bone, and he's got it in his mouth and can't get it out! Easy there! don't touch it!" came the sharp command, as Jack Young took a step forward, evidently with the intention of helping the distressed animal.

"What's the matter, Colonel?" asked Jack. "You don't want to see the dog suffer, do you?"

"No, but—there, he's got it out himself!"

With an effort the dog had pawed from his mouth the watch, which, being rather large and of peculiar shape, had for some time, been stuck in his jaws. It rolled out on the floor, and the

colonel stooped to pick it up. But Jack noticed that his chief used a wad of the tissue paper with which to handle the timepiece, which was no longer ticking.

"What's the matter—'fraid of soiling your hands?" asked Jack with a laugh.

"Well, yes, in a way—"

"Look at the dog's mouth! It's bleeding!" cried Jack, pointing.

"I was afraid it would be," said the colonel, quietly. "Don't go near him, Jack, for, unless I'm much mistaken—"

The two men gazed at the dog. The little animal suddenly looked up at them in a peculiar manner. It whined and its body was shaken as with a cold shiver. A little blood was running down the lips which were now foam-flecked.

"The dog's going mad!" cried Jack. "Look out, Colonel, or—"

"You needn't be afraid," was the calm answer, as the other turned toward the door. "He'll never hurt any one. Ah, I thought so!"

And, as the colonel spoke, Chet gave a shudder, fell over on his side and, with a long sigh, lay very still.

CHAPTER XVI

THE COLONEL WONDERS

"WHAT did that, Colonel? What devilish thing did that?" and with a trembling finger Jack Young pointed to the body of the dead dog on the floor of the detective's room. "What killed the poor brute?"

"Unless I'm very much mistaken *this* did," was the answer in a low voice, and the colonel, with the watch still wrapped carefully in the wad of tissue paper, placed it on the table.

"That ticker killed the dog? Nonsense! He didn't swallow it! He had it in his mouth, but he got it out! *That* couldn't have killed him!"

"I think it did though, Jack, just as it killed Shere Ali and just as—"

"Do you mean—that's what killed Mrs. Darcy —that watch?"

"I don't know yet, Jack."

"But how could it? How could—"

The visitor ceased his questions to watch the colonel, who had gone to a closet and taken out a pair of rubber gloves. Putting them on, he took the watch from its tissue paper wrappings, and

then, holding it under the gleaming light on his table, he gave a twist to the case, pressed on a certain point in the rim with the end of his lead pencil and a tiny needle shot out into view.

"Look!" said the colonel to Jack Young.

"Good Lord! An infernal machine in a watch!"

"Not exactly an infernal machine, but a poisoned needle which only required pressure on the rim of the case to shoot it out into the hand, or whatever part of a person or animal was near it. Poor Chet, gnawing the watch which he was playing with—worrying it as he would a bone—must have bitten on the right place. The needle shot out, pierced his tongue or lips and—the deadly poison did the rest!"

"But, Colonel—this—this is the watch Mrs. Darcy had in her hand when she was found dead!"

"Yes," was the cool response.

"And it's the same one Shere Ali had in his hand when *he* was found dead!"

"Yes."

"But both of them had their heads smashed in!"

"Yes, Jack."

"But, Great Scott, Colonel! the watch can't do that as well as poison to death! It's out of the question!"

"Of course it is. I didn't claim the watch did anything like that. I don't even claim the poison-

needle watch killed Mrs. Darcy or Shere Ali. But that it *did* kill Chet I'm certain."

"I believe you're right there, Colonel Ashley. Poor little dog!" and Jack, who loved animals, looked at the limp body.

"I know I'm right, Jack. If I had seen, in time, that he had the watch I'd have tried to get it away from him. But maybe it will turn out for the best. In the interests of justice—"

"Do you think this will help in solving the mystery?"

"It may."

"But I thought you said the poison-needle watch might not have killed Mrs. Darcy?"

"I'm not saying anything, Jack. It might, and might not."

"But the blow on her head—the stab wound in her side—?"

"Both could have been inflicted after the poison watch killed her—if it did. Mind you, Jack, I'm making no statements. I am only suggesting possibilities."

"But— Great Scott, Colonel—Shere Ali was killed in the same way! He had the ticking watch in his hand, and his head was smashed in!"

"Yes."

"And of course *he* may have been struck on his head after he died from the poisoned watch?"

"Exactly."

"And this watch Darcy had in his possession to repair just before Mrs. Darcy was found dead, and she had it in her hand and—say, Colonel, where are we at?" and Jack Young looked hopelessly at his chief.

"I don't know," was the measured answer. "I wish I did. There is only one thing we can be sure of, and that is, no matter what part Darcy had in the murder—if he had any—by means of this watch in the case of Mrs. Darcy, he had none in Shere Ali's case, for Darcy was locked up when that tragedy occurred."

"That's so, Colonel. And yet— Oh, well, what's the use of speculating? What are you going to do next?"

"I don't know. I wish—"

There came another knock on the door and a voice asked:

"Is Chet in here, Colonel? I generally find him with you when he isn't in my room and—"

Mr. Bland entered through the opened door, and from the figures of the detective and his helper the eyes of Chet's owner went to that of the motionless dog. Chet's master sensed something wrong, for with a cry of his pet's name he hurried toward the stretched-out animal.

"Don't!" exclaimed the colonel, reaching out a restraining hand. "The dog has been poisoned,

and with a poison so deadly that even some of the foam from his lips, in a tiny scratch, might cause your death. Don't touch him with bare hands."

"Poisoned, Colonel! Chet poisoned?"

Sorrowfully enough Colonel Ashley told how it had happened, showing the poisoned watch, but not disclosing the fact that it was the one which had figured in the deaths of Mrs. Darcy and Shere Ali. And as nothing had yet been made public to the effect that the watch, which had had a part in both cases, was more than an ordinary timepiece Mr. Bland did not connect it with these two deaths. Colonel Ashley let it be understood that the watch was a curiosity having to do with some case he was investigating.

"And if I had even dreamed that your dog would take it off the stool to worry it, as he might a bone, I'd never have let him in here," said the detective. "I can't tell you how sorry I am, Mr. Bland, for I loved Chet almost as much as you did."

"I know—I know! And he liked you. Poor little dog! Poor little dog!"

Tenderly they bore him out, the colonel insisting that no one touch him with ungloved hands, and a little later Chet was quietly buried.

"But what are you going to do about that watch—and all that it means?" asked Jack Young,

later, when he was about to depart to take up the shadowing of Harry King.

"I'm going to see how it's made and try to learn whether or not Darcy was aware of its deadly nature. If he was—"

The colonel did not finish.

"Well, I'll get on my way," said Jack, after a pause. "I'll keep in touch with you, in case you need me."

"And don't lose sight of Harry King," was the parting admonition. "Something just as unexpected as this may turn up in his case," and the colonel motioned to the watch.

Left to himself, the detective looked at the timepiece on his table, now silent in its tissue wrapping. The needle, which under the magnifying glass was shown to be hollow, probably drawing the poison from some receptacle inside the case, had slipped back out of sight when the pressure was removed from the rim.

"The watch of death!" mused the colonel. "I must see how you are made inside, and I think I'd better have a professional perform an autopsy on you. I'll send for Kettridge. He knows all about watches, though I question if he ever saw one like this."

The colonel was about to use his telephone when it rang and, answering it, he was told that another visitor wished to see him.

"Who is it?" he asked the clerk downstairs.

"Mr. Aaron Grafton."

"Send him up."

Grafton was plainly nervous as he entered the room; and the colonel, had he not been a man of experience, might have allowed this nervousness to influence his judgment, and bring into too much prominence the first suspicions the detective had felt regarding this man.

"Ah, Mr. Grafton, you wish to see me?"

"Only for a moment, Colonel Ashley. I don't like to call on you thus openly, for it might give rise to all sorts of questions, but—"

"Oh, don't let that worry you. I'm a detective, and known as such now. And you, as the owner of a large department store, where shoplifting and other crimes may be committed any day, are often in need of the services of detectives, I should say."

"I am, but—"

"Well, don't worry. If any one knows of your coming to me they will imagine you wish to consult me about something connected with your store. So don't let that influence you. But has anything else happened?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Grafton, "there has."

"What?" asked the colonel.

"Well, I've come to say that I don't think I'll need your services any more."

"Not need them?"

"No. And I wish to pay you and thank you. I'm ever so much obliged to you for what you have done—"

"But I haven't done anything yet. I haven't —Oh, I see. You are not satisfied with my work on your behalf. Well, I can't say I blame you, for really I haven't had time to give it as much consideration as I'd like. Still that couldn't be helped and—"

"Oh, don't misunderstand me, Colonel Ashley. I am not at all dissatisfied," and Mr. Grafton held up a protesting hand. "The truth is, I'll not need your services in helping me to recover the diamond cross for Mrs. Larch—or Miss Ratchford, as she calls herself since the separation. You can drop that case, Colonel."

"Drop it?"

"Yes, the diamond cross has been recovered. I just had a letter from Cyn—from Miss Ratchford, saying she has the cross."

"She has the missing diamond cross?" fairly cried the detective.

"Yes."

"Where did she get it. Could Spotty—" The colonel whispered the last name to himself and then stopped short.

"I don't know. I just had a telegram from her, and I am going to see her now to learn the

particulars," went on Aaron Grafton. "She is in Pompey, you know—where she used to live as a girl, and where I— Well, I'm going to see her. I came to tell you the diamond cross mystery is solved and if you will let me know what I owe you I'll send you a check."

"Oh, that part will be all right, Mr. Grafton. But I don't understand."

"Nor do I," flung back Aaron Grafton over his shoulder, as he left the colonel's room, rather hastily. "I'll tell you as soon as I've seen Miss Ratchford. Good-bye!" and he was gone.

For a moment the colonel remained motionless in the middle of the room. Then a queer look came over his face as he murmured:

"Now I wonder whether he's telling the truth —or lying! Is the diamond cross in her possession, or did Grafton say that so I'd drop the case and—leave him out of it? I wonder. And, by the same token of wondering I think I'd better not let you get too far away from me, Mr. Grafton. You will bear a little closer watching."

CHAPTER XVII

"A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW"

"WELL," remarked Colonel Ashley briskly to himself, "there are two or three things I've got to do, and do them right away. Which shall I tackle first? I wonder if it won't be best to have Kettridge come here and perform the autopsy on that watch," and he looked toward the closet where he had placed the one that had belonged to Singa Phut. "If I can look inside that, and see whether or not the mechanism is so obvious that Darcy must have stumbled on it when he started to repair it—if he did—then—well, that complicates matters. Yes, I think I must see Kettridge."

Once more the colonel started toward his room telephone, intending to summon the jeweler, who was living over the store in Mrs. Darcy's rooms.

The colonel paused at the instrument, recalling that, as he had been about to use it before there had come in a call for him—the call announcing the department-store keeper.

But this time the instrument was mute, and the colonel had soon asked central for the tele-

phone in the apartments now occupied by Mr. Kettridge. There was a period of waiting.

"I am ringing Marcy 5426 announced the pleasant voice of the girl in the central office.

"Thank you," responded the detective.

Another period of waiting, and again the announcement of the girl, though the colonel had not manifested any impatience.

"Very well," he responded. "There may be no one at home."

It was evident, a little later, that at least no one intended to answer the telephone, and the colonel hung up he receiver.

"Well, Kettridge can wait," he murmured, as he carefully put away the watch, thinking, with a sigh of regret, of poor little Chet. The dog was a friendly animal and had made many friends in the hotel.

"And so Miss Ratchford—to use her maiden name—has the diamond cross back again," mused the colonel. "But how in the world could she get it, when Spotty had it, and the police that are holding him have that, and he's resisting extradition? Say, I wish I could go fishing!" and the colonel shook his head in dogged impatience at the tangle into which the affair had snarled itself.

"Spotty must have robbed the jewelry store in spite of what he says about it," mused the

Colonel. "But if he did, and got the cross, even if he didn't kill Mrs. Darcy, how in the world could he get the cross back to her when the police took it away from him and when the last I saw of it it was in the police headquarters safe?

"This certainly gets me! Oh Shag! is that you?" called the colonel as he heard some one moving out in the hall near his door.

"Yes, sah, Colonel!"

"You stay here until I come back. I'm going out, and I don't know what time I'll be in. Be careful to get straight any messages that come in over the wire, and if Jack Young calls up get the 'phone number of the place where he is so I can call him."

"Yes, sah, Colonel."

"And, Shag!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel!"

"Hand me that little green book. I may have to be up all night, and I want something to read that will keep me awake," and the colonel slipped into his coat pocket the green volume. He was taking his fishing by a sort of "correspondence school method" it will be observed.

The detective busied himself about his apartment getting ready to go out, and from a suitcase which was closed with a complicated lock he took a number of articles which he stowed away in various pockets of his garments.

"Is yo' gwine be out all night, Colonel?" asked Shag.

"I can't say. I'm going to do a bit of shadow work and it may take me until sunrise. But you stay right here."

"Yes, sah, Colonel. I will."

"And now we'll see, Mr. Aaron Grafton," said the detective to himself, as he prepared to leave, "whether you're telling the truth or not. I think my one best bet is to follow you when you go to see Miss Cynthia!"

But before the colonel could leave the room there sounded the insistent ringing of his telephone bell.

"I wonder if that can be Kettridge," he mused. "And yet he wouldn't know that I had called him. Answer it, Shag," he directed. "It may be some one I don't care to talk to now. Don't say I'm here until you find out who it is."

"Yes, sah, Colonel!"

The colored servant unhooked the receiver and listened a moment. Then, carefully covering the mouthpiece with his hand, he announced:

"It's Mr. Young, Colonel!"

"Is it! Good! Hold him! I'll talk with him!"

Quickly crossing the room the detective spoke rapidly into the instrument.

"Hello, Jack! This is the colonel. Yes—what is it? He is? That's unusual—for him. Guess

he's going down and out by the wrong route! Yes, I'll come right away! You follow King and I'll take the trail after Larch. So he's boasting that— Well, all sorts of things may happen now. Yes, I'm on my way now. You follow King!"

The detective remained motionless for a few seconds after he had slipped the receiver into its hook. Then he said to Shag:

"Do you know where I ought to be now?"

The colored man paused a moment before replying. Then he played a safety shot by answering:

"No, sah, Colonel, I jest doesn't—zactly."

"Well, I ought to be getting ready to go fishing. I'm sick of this whole business. I'm going to quit! I never ought to have gone into it. I'm too old. I told 'em that, but they wouldn't believe me."

"Too old to go *fishin'*, sah, Colonel? No *sah!* You'll never be dat! Never!"

"Oh, I don't mean fishing, Shag! I mean I never ought to have been mixed up with this affair—this detective business. I'm going to quit now. Shag!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel!"

"Get me Kedge on the long distance."

"Mr. Kedge, in N' York, sah?"

"Yes. I'm going to turn this over to him. It's

getting on my nerves. I want to go fishing. I'll let him work out the rest of the problems. Get Kedge on the wire."

"Yes, sah, Colonel."

The colored man went to the instrument, but before he had engaged the attention of central his master called:

"Oh, Shag!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel."

"Wait a minute. I suppose Kedge is very busy now?"

"Well, yes, sah, I s'pects so. He had dat ar' animal case."

"Oh, you mean Mr. Campbell's?"

"Yes, sah! Dat's it. I knowed it was a camel or a elephant."

"Yes, I suppose he's busy on that. So don't bother him. Anyhow, it would take him as long to get here, pick up the loose ends, and start out right, as it would take me to finish."

"Mo'so, Colonel," voiced Shag. "A whole lot mo'."

"Oh, well, hang it all! That's the way it is. I never can get a little vacation. But now I'm in this game I suppose I might as well stick! Never mind that call, Shag! I'll finish this."

"Yes, sah, Colonel."

A fact which the wise Shag had known all along.

"For it's always good weather,
When good fellows get together!"

Over and over again the not unmusical strains welled out from one of the private rooms, opening off the grill of the Homestead. At times Larch stopped at the entrance, smiling good-naturedly, but with rather a cynical look on his clean-chiseled but cruel face. More than once his eyes sought those of Harry King, and the latter nodded and smiled. He was spending money freely, but was keeping himself well in hand, though a waiter was at his side more often than at the side of any of the others.

"How long has this been going on, Jack?" asked the colonel, who reached the hotel soon after his talk with Shag.

"All the afternoon, I guess, and it looks as if it would be all night."

"So it does! I wish I'd never gotten into this mess, but I can't get out now. Kedge would be sure to spoil it after I've started things moving. What especially did you want to tell me?"

"Well, King is in there, in his usual state—dignified, of course, but how long he'll stay that way I can't tell. It's Larch that puzzles me."

"Yes, it isn't usual for him to make such a congenial companion of himself with his customers. But he's very different since his wife

separated from him. He doesn't hold himself so highly."

"And it's telling on his business."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that a number of his best friends are leaving him. The way it used to be was that the Homestead was patronized by a good class of people and organizations, some that even were opposed to the liquor trade. They knew they could have it or not have it as they pleased. But now Larch is catering more and more to parties that wouldn't come here if there wasn't something strong to drink, and that's driving the other sort away."

"Yes, I've noticed that of late."

"And that isn't all," went on Young. "Larch is going to come a cropper, if I'm any judge."

"What do you mean?" Again the Colonel seemed puzzled.

"I mean he's going to smash financially. He's been making some poor investments of late, as well as gambling heavily, and his money can't last forever. He had a lot, but most of it is gone."

"I hadn't heard that."

"Well, it's true. He was well off when he married. That's the reason he got such a pretty wife, I hear. Her folks were ambitious for her. Well, she did shine for a while, for the Home-

stead was not an ordinary hotel. It was more of a Colchester institution. But it's fast becoming something else now.

"Larch is being pressed for cash, and that may be one reason why he's so thick with Harry King. King's got cash, if it can only be gotten at. I overheard Larch sounding him as to the chances of raising a big sum."

"And what did King say?"

"He agreed to try to get it for Larch. That's all I gathered then. But I heard them talking of something else."

"What?"

"Larch dropped a hint that he and his wife might be reconciled."

"The deuce you say!"

"That's right, Colonel. I heard him telling King about it. Larch is going to pay his wife a visit—going to call on her at her father's place in Pompey. And he's going to take her out a present. I believe that's the usual thing after a quarrel."

"Possibly," admitted the colonel. "Oh, I wish I'd never mixed up in this! I'm sorry for young Darcy, and I believe— Oh, well, what's the use of talking now! I'm in it and I must see it through. So Larch is going to visit his wife?"

"Yes. He's either sent her a present or is going to. I couldn't quite catch which."

"What sort of present, Jack?"

"A diamond cross."

"What?" and the colonel had suddenly to modulate his voice or he would have attracted more attention that he cared to. "A diamond cross? Are you sure about that, Young?"

"Sure! Why not? I don't see anything queer there. He might buy her a diamond cross as a sort of foregiveness gift. Same idea Harry King had you know, but a little higher class, that's all.

"You know, Colonel, these things are about alike. The man on Water Street gets drunk and brings his wife home a quart of oysters as a peace offering. The man on the boulevard does the same thing and patches up the break with a pearl pendant. It's all the same, only different."

"Yes, I suppose so. I didn't know you were a philosopher, Jack."

"I'm not. It's just common sense."

"But a diamond cross! And if Larch is losing ing money—"

"Oh, well, he may have held out some, or maybe the diamond cross isn't so elaborate. You know they take a lot of little diamonds now, set 'em in a cluster and make 'em look as good as a solitaire. Anyhow Larch has been boasting to King that there's to be a diamond cross present. And there's another angle to it."

"What's that, Jack?"

"Well, there's been some talk between Larch and King about some big diamonds that have been sold of late. I couldn't catch whether King had sold them or Larch. Anyhow they brought quite a sum of money. Maybe they were stolen from the jewelry stock."

"Not unless Mrs. Darcy had some of which James Darcy knew nothing."

"Well, I saw Larch at one time, and Harry King at another, have one of those white tissue paper packages that jewelers keep diamonds in. I didn't get a glimpse at the stones themselves. I had to be a bit cautious you know, and, even now, I think they're suspicious of me here. If it wasn't that King drinks so much, though he manages to walk and talk straight. I believe he'd try to pump me. Anyhow, I thought I'd better let you know what I'd heard."

"Jack, I'm glad you did. So Larch has sent, or is going to send, his wife a diamond cross! Well, then, Grafton might be right about that after all. Gad! this thing *is* getting mixed up! Now, Jack—"

A waiter who knew the colonel, from the fact that the latter was a striking figure and had been in the Homestead more than once, approached the private room occupied by the detective and Jack Young and announced:

"Excuse me, Colonel, but you are wanted at the telephone."

"All right. Where is it?"

"You can come right in here and have the call transferred from our central," and the man opened the door of a small booth. The Homestead was honeycombed with private rooms, booths and telephones.

"Yes, this is Colonel, Ashley" announced the detective into the instrument, when his identity had been questioned. "Who are you? Oh, Shag! Yes, Shag, what is it? What's that—at the jewelry store you say? Well, will this never end? Yes, I'll go there at once!"

"What is it?" asked Jack, as the colonel hung up the receiver.

"Why, Kettridge telephoned to my room, and Shag took the message and repeated it to me. Sallie Page, the old servant of Mrs. Darcy has just been killed by an electric shock in the jewelry store!"

CHAPTER XVIII

AMY'S TEST

However it was not quite as bad as that, though Sallie Page had received a severe shock, and had been near to death. Prompt action on the part of the physician on the hospital ambulance had started her feeble heart, which had been affected by the current of electricity, to beating.

This, among other things, Colonel Ashley learned when he hastened to the jewelry store from the Homestead, leaving at the latter place his trusty lieutenant, Jack Young, to look after both Larch and Harry King, neither of whom seemed likely to leave the place very soon.

"Tell me more about it," said the colonel, when he was sitting with Mr. Kettridge in the dimly-lighted jewelry shop after Sallie had been taken to the hospital. "What shocked her?"

"The same electric wires on the showcase that shocked Miss Brill the other day. The electricians had been told to remove them, but had not yet done so."

"But I thought those wires were dead—cut—after the other accident, Mr. Kettridge."

"So they were. But they can be supplied with current from another source, it seems, and I was the innocent cause of doing it."

"You! How?"

"By throwing over a switch on the work bench where James Darcy used to busy himself!"

"An electric switch on Darcy's work bench?"

"Yes, come and see for yourself. I've sent for the electrician to come and rip out everything. I'll have the place all wired over. It was a makeshift job to begin with, and since Darcy complicated the wires with some that he hoped to run his electric lathe with, there is no telling when one may get a shock."

"How did it happen?" asked the colonel, as the jeweler led the way to that part of the store where Darcy had the repair bench, behind the watch showcase. It was now close to midnight, and the excitement over the accident to Sallie, which had occurred after the closing hour for the store, had subsided, not as much of a crowd having gathered at that time of the evening as would have done earlier.

"Well, it happened this way," explained Kettridge. "We're going to have a special sale of a medium-priced line of goods to-morrow. I was getting ready for it after the clerks had gone—setting out the display and the like—when I found I needed help.

"It wasn't much—just the little odds and ends that a woman can do better than a man when it comes to making things look fancy. I might have telephoned for Miss Brill, but I didn't like to bring her back, as she'd worked hard all day.

"Then I thought of Sallie Page. It's true she's deaf, but she has been in the family, so to speak, a long while, and she knows the shop and the goods pretty well. She's quick if she is old, so I got her down about nine o'clock and we started in."

"Then exactly how it happened I don't know. I was puttering around the work table where Darcy used to do his jewel setting and his repair work, and Sallie was over near the showcase. I wanted more light on a certain piece of jewelry I had in my hand, and I thoughtlessly threw over a switch I saw on Darcy's table. It was a switch I hadn't noticed before—in fact, I accidentally uncovered it by moving a collection of his tools I hadn't previously disturbed.

"No sooner had I closed the circuit than I heard a scream from Sallie and saw her fall backwards. I had given her a shock without knowing it."

"That was queer," murmured the colonel. "Let me have a look at that switch."

"And, while you're about it, I'll look too," said another voice in the dimly-lighted store, and,

as the two turned in startled surprise, they saw Detective Carroll smiling at them.

"I heard there was another accident up here," he went on, still smiling, "so I came to have a look. The side door was open and I walked in. Guess you didn't hear me. These rubber heels don't make much noise."

"They don't, indeed, when you walk on them and not on the soles," observed the colonel grimly. "The question is, what do you want to see?"

"The electric switch on Darcy's table," was the answer. "I couldn't help hearing what you said, Mr. Kettridge," said Carroll, "and I don't know as I would have tried not to if I could. This is important. I rather guess it makes it look a bit bad for your friend, Colonel Ashley," and there was a sneer in the words.

"Well, I don't know," was the cool response. "The wires, as I understand it, are to run an electric lathe, and they might easily have become crossed."

"Oh, yes, of course!" admitted Carroll. "And then, again, they might have been crossed on purpose. It's a new stunt—electrically shocking an old lady before you bang her over the head or stab her, but it's a good one. I'll have a look at that switch. I thought maybe I might find something interesting here when I heard about the shock to the old servant, and I didn't miss my guess."

There was nothing for the colonel or Mr. Kettridge to say or do, and they remained passive while Carroll took his time looking about. Then he telephoned for Haliday of the prosecutor's office, and also for the chief electrician of the police signal system, and all three spent some time looking at the wires and testing them.

"What do you think about it?" asked Mr. Kettridge of the colonel, when the store was again dim and quiet.

"What do I think? I don't know! I'm going to have a talk with Darcy in the morning, and if I find he's been deceiving me— Well, I'll drop his case, that's all."

If Darcy simulated surprise when, the next morning at the jail, told by the colonel of what had happened to Sallie Page, the prisoner was a consumate actor, the detective thought.

"Colonel Ashley!" Darcy exclaimed. "I never knew that my lathe wires crossed or connected with any circuit that might shock a person. It is true I had the wires run in secretely, as I didn't want my cousin to know about them. She didn't favor my experiments on the electrical lathe, and I had to keep quiet about it.

"But I never strung those wires to shock her, and of course you can easily imagine I never could plan to injure Sallie Page that way, or the young lady who was knocked down the other day."

"Well, Darcy, you may be telling the truth, and, again, you may not," and the colonel's voice was as noncommittal as possible. "But I am bound to point out to you that the prosecution will make the most of this, and that—it looks bad for you."

"I know it does, Colonel. But I had no more to do with my cousin's death than Carroll or you. Nor have I the least suspicion who did kill her. My God! what object would I have?" and he turned and paced up and down.

"Well I'll do the best I can," said the colonel. "But I must say it looks black. Then you never knew your wires might, by the closing of the switch on your table, shock some one standing near the show case?"

"I never dreamed of it! The wires must have been changed since I used them."

"That will be looked into. And the stopping of the clocks? Could your apparatus have done that?"

"Never. It is true a strong electrical current might, under certain circumstances, stop clocks as well as start them. But it would not stop all the clocks in the store—or all that were going—at different hours."

"Perhaps not. Well, I must see what I can do. Carroll and Thong, with the prosecutor's men, will use this for all it is worth. We must

combat it somehow."

"Please find a way, Colonel! I was so hopeful and—now—"

The young man could not go on for a moment because of his emotion.

"Amy—Miss Mason—how does *she* take this?" he faltered.

"She doesn't know it yet, I believe. It didn't get in this morning's papers, but it will be in this afternoon's."

"I wish you could see her and explain. I—I can't stand it to have her lose faith in me."

"I'll see what I can do. I'll put the best face on it I can for her."

"And you yourself, Colonel! You—you don't believe me guilty because of this new development, do you?"

"If I did I wouldn't still be handling your case, Mr. Darcy," was the answer. "But I don't say that there isn't something to explain. I am, now, giving you the benefit of the doubt."

"Then maybe Amy will do the same."

It was not many hours before the colonel knew this point. The first edition afternoon papers had not long been out when the detective, who had gone to his hotel after an early morning visit to the jail, was telephoned to by Miss Mason.

"I happened to be in town, shopping," she said, and the agitation was plainly audible in

her voice, "when I saw this terrible thing about Mr. Darcy's wires and poor Sallie. Is she in any danger, Colonel?"

"I believe not."

"That's good! May I come to see you? I have something important to ask you."

"Yes, or I will come to see you, Miss Mason."

"No, I had rather come to your hotel, if you will meet me in the ladies' parlor. It will be secluded enough at this time."

And a little later Amy and the colonel were talking. The girl's haggard look told plainly of her distress.

"Tell me, frankly," she begged, "doesn't this make it look a little worse for Mr. Darcy?"

"Yes, Miss Mason, it does. I had best be frank with you. The prosecutor is bound to show that the presence of the wires, controlled by a switch from Mr. Darcy's table, were so arranged that he might shock his cousin, or any one who put his hands on the showcase. And they will, undoubtedly, argue that he planned this to make her insensible for his own purposes, whether it was that he did it in a fit of passion to kill her for his fancied troubles, or to cover up a robbery. I am only making it thus bald that you may know and face the worst."

"I appreciate that, and I thank you. Then it does look bad for him?"

"It does."

"And how does he bear up under it?"

"Very well. His chief anxiety is regarding you. I realize this is a test of friendship, Miss Mason. A test of both the loyalty of yourself and your father, and—"

"Oh, you needn't worry about *dad!* He'll stick by Jimmie through thick and thin, for he says he knows he's innocent."

"And yourself? How does your loyalty meet the test?"

Amy Mason drew herself up, a splendid figure of beautiful womanhood. She flashed a look at the detective that made him stand to his full military height and bearing, and then she said:

"Do you think I'm going to let dad beat *me?* Oh, no, Colonel Ashley!"

So Amy Mason met the test.

CHAPTER XIX

WORD FROM SPOTTY

"WELL," remarked Jack Young, as he critically observed the smoke from his cigar curling upward toward the ceiling in the colonel's hotel room, "we have our work cut out for us all right."

"I should say so!" agreed Mr. Kettridge, who sat before a little table, on top of which were strewed parts of a watch. Mr. Kettridge had a jeweler's magnifying glass stuck in one eye, and it gave him a most grotesque appearance as he glanced from the wheels, springs and levers, spread out in front of him, over to Colonel Ashley.

"There is only one thing to do, gentlemen," observed the detective, who had one finger keeping a certain place in a certain green book. "And that is—"

"Make an arrest at once!" exclaimed Young. "He may get away from us if we don't, drunk as he is."

"No, there's time enough for that," objected the colonel. "What I was going to say is that

we must take one thing at a time. Otherwise we'll get into a tangle."

"I think we're in one now," said Young. "For the life of me I can't figure out who did the killing, and the only reason I said we ought to arrest Harry King is because there's some game on between him and Larch, and those diamonds King is trying to dispose of may be part of some of those Mrs. Darcy had, and about which she never said anything. If King took them, he may have killed the old lady and he ought to be locked up and take his chance with Darcy."

"If he did it—yes," admitted the colonel. "But I haven't said he *did*. I haven't said Larch did it. I just don't know. Certainly King and Larch have been pretty thick of late, and Larch's bailing Harry out showed there was more than mere friendliness in it. And, as you say, Jack, if King or Larch sold some loose diamonds, it looks as though there was something wrong. But we don't want to make a mistake."

"If we don't do something pretty soon they'll so fasten this crime on Jimmie Darcy that you'll never be able to get him out of the tangle," said Mr. Kettridge, as he poked a pair of pliers among the parts of the watch. "Carroll and Thong, now that they know about the electrical wires, think they have all the evidence they need, and the prosecutor agrees with them, I guess."

"Still, we may be able to combat that," observed the colonel. "Now let me understand you about this watch, Mr. Kettridge. You don't believe Darcy ever put that poison needle arrangement in it?"

"No, I don't. That mechanism was built into the watch after it was originally made, I'm sure. But even so it was done a number of years ago. I can tell that by the type of small screws used. They don't make that kind in this country. Darcy never could have got possession of any, to say nothing of some of the other parts used."

Following some days of strenuous work after Amy Mason had expressed her belief in her lover's innocence in spite of the finding of the electric wires, and had urged the detective to use every endeavor to clear Darcy, the colonel had summoned Mr. Kettridge to hold a sort of autopsy over the Indian watch which was still in possession of the old detective. With the suicide of the East Indian the case had been dropped by Donovan and the authorities, they taking it for granted that Singa Phut had killed Shere Ali and then ended his own life, by help from outside in getting poison. So if Donovan thought anything about the watch, he said nothing.

"Then you think Darcy is cleared of any connection with the poison watch?" asked the colonel.

"I think so—yes," answered the jeweler. "As

a matter of fact, I don't believe Jimmie did any repair work on it at all. Singa Phut brought it in to have it fixed, it is true, but Jimmie was a great chap for promising work and then not having it ready on time. I've known him to do that more than once, and he lost Mrs. Darcy customers that way. He probably promised Singa Phut to have the watch ready for him, and then, either in working on his pet invention, the electric lathe, or because of his quarrel with his cousin, forgot about the East Indian's watch. He may, as he says, have gotten up early to redeem his promise to repair it."

"But he never did?" asked the colonel.

"It bears no evidence of it," and the jeweler focused his glass on the dismembered timepiece.

"Do you think he knew the deadly nature of the watch?" went on the detective.

"It is doubtful. This watch is of peculiar construction. As I have showed you, the poison needle could only be made to protrude when the watch reached a certain time, which time could be set in advance as an alarm clock is set. I think this is what happened, though I may be wrong.

"Singa Phut, for purposes of his own, had this poisoned watch in his possession. He, of course, knew just what it would do, and how to set it so that if a person, at a certain hour, took

it into his or her hands, and exerted any pressure on the rim, the needle would shoot out and puncture the flesh. The poison on the point then caused death."

"And very speedy death," added the colonel. "Witness what happened to poor little Chet. The watch was wound up—I wound it myself as a matter of fact, though I did not dream that the time mechanism had anything to do with the poisoned needle. Then the dog, playing with it, as he would with a bone, bit on the rim, just at the time when the needle was set to operate. It shot out, punctured his lip, and Chet died."

"Did you know it was a poisoned watch?" asked Jack Young.

"I had guessed that after what happened, and that is why I warned Donovan to be careful. But, as I said, I thought it was like a sword cane or a spring dagger—that only pressure on a certain part was needed to force out the needle with its death-carrying smear of some subtle Indian poison. I never dreamed it was like an alarm clock."

"Well, it was," said Mr. Kettridge. "I can easily see all the parts, now that I have taken it apart, and the time-setting arrangement is very compact, simple and effective."

"You were careful not to scratch yourself on the needle?" asked the colonel quickly.

"Oh, yes indeed! I took that out first. But do you think, Colonel, in spite of what I have said about Jimmie not knowing how this watch operated, and, presumably, not having done any work on it—do you think he can have planned to kill Mrs. Darcy with it?"

"Hardly. And yet it is possible that Mrs. Darcy may have been killed by the watch."

"Killed by it?—how?" gasped Jack Young. "I thought she was stabbed, and her skull fractured."

"She had both those injuries, it is true. But what is to have prevented her from having been punctured by the watch just before she received those hurts?

"I mean in this way," went on the colonel. "We will assume that Singa Phut, finding some trifling thing the matter with his devilish watch, brought it to the Darcy shop, where he was fairly well known.

"Darcy promised to fix the timepiece but neglected or forgot to do it, leaving it on his table. Then, remembering it early in the morning —perhaps feeling guilty at having spent part of the night working on his electric lathe—he got up to do as he had promised, and—"

"Finds his cousin dead!" interrupted Mr. Kettridge.

"So he *says!*" added Jack Young significantly.

"Well, we won't go into that," observed the colonel. "I was going to make another point. Leaving Darcy out of it, and assuming that he had left the watch on his table intending to get up in the morning and fix it, what is to have prevented Mrs. Darcy from coming down to her store—say, before midnight, after Darcy left her.

"She saw the watch on the table, and, picking it up, may have wound it. This set in motion the death-dealing mechanism, and her hand may have been punctured with the poison."

"But, even then," put in Young, as he puffed out another cloud of smoke, "if the poison from the watch killed her, why would any one strike her on the head and stab her?"

"That may have occurred just after her hand was punctured by the needle of the watch," said the detective, "and before the poison had time to work. It is not instantaneous."

"But who would have struck or stabbed her after that?" asked Mr. Kettridge. "I mean, of course, leaving Jimmie out, for I don't believe he did it."

"Could not Singa Phut have done it?" asked Colonel Ashley quietly.

"Singa Phut!" cried both his auditors.

"Yes. Suppose, after he had left the watch to be repaired with young Darcy, the East Indian happened to think that he had not warned against

winding it up, which a jeweler would be most apt to do after making repairs. Singa Phut had no reason for wishing harm to Darcy. He may have come to the store late at night intending to warn him to be careful."

"Well, assuming that, what next?" asked Jack Young.

"Well, Singa, coming say at eleven o'clock to the jewelry store, finds Mrs. Darcy there. She has picked up the watch—she must have done that, for it was in her hand. Singa sees it and fearful of what might happen he rushes in and tries to take it away from her. She, thinking him a thief, resists and he, fearful that he will be caught and arrested as a robber, struggles to get the watch and to make his escape.

"Now remember that he is of excitable nature, that he is a foreigner, fearful of our laws, and that he knows the deadly nature of the poison in the watch. Could not he have both struck Mrs. Darcy with the hunter statue and stabbed her in trying to get away from her? That would account for the killing."

"But there would have been an alarm—the struggle would have made a noise," objected Jack Young.

"Yes, but there are not many people passing the store around midnight. Every one in the place had gone to bed—the sleeping rooms are

quite a distance from the shop. Then, too, very little noise may have been made. I remember in the Peal case two strong and vigorous men battled at midnight, one killing the other, in a store on a main street in a big city. But trolley cars and autos going past drowned all sounds of the fight. It may have been so in this case."

"Are you going to offer that to the jury to clear Darcy?" asked Mr. Kettridge.

"I may have to," was the colonel's answer. "How does it sound to you, gentlemen?"

"Very plausible," admitted Jack Young. "But what about the electric wires on Darcy's table?"

"They are a problem, I admit. However, though Carroll thinks he can prove they were arranged deliberately to shock any one who, at the proper moment, might touch the showcase, yet I think we can prove that an accidental crossing of perfectly harmless wires to Darcy's lathe with the city's electric light circuit may have caused the two accidents. That is a point I have yet to consider. But we have settled something regarding the watch, anyhow. Now, Jack, I want to talk to you about Harry King."

"He needs to be talked about," was the response. "I don't say he had anything to do with the murder—especially not after what you have said about Singa Phut. But Harry King needs watching."

"I agree with you. You say he and Larch have been looking at a packet of diamonds?"

"Yes; diamonds wrapped in those little squares of white paper that jewelers use. Looks like they'd been robbing a gem store."

"You don't know of any diamonds missing from Mrs. Darcy's stock, do you?" asked the colonel of Mr. Kettridge. "Mr. Young and I talked of this before but didn't settle it."

"No. But then she may have had a private stock of which Darcy nor I knew nothing. It is a point worth looking into."

"I agree with you. So stick to Harry, Jack, my boy."

"He won't require much sticking to at present. He and Larch are both so well pickled that they'll easily keep until morning."

"Well, watch them after that. Maybe you'd better put up at the Homestead."

"I will, though I guess it won't be the Homestead long."

"Why not?"

"Well, Larch is going to lose it, I hear. It's mortgaged up to the roof and he can't meet his payments. The old place has gone to the bow-wows since he started drinking, gambling, speculating and since his wife left him. All the decent crowd stopped coming."

"Yes, I suppose so," agreed the colonel. "Well,

keep watch of Harry King. He may provide us with a clew that will make it possible to prove Darcy innocent more directly than by the inference of Singa Phut."

"And do you think Singa Phut killed his partner with the watch also, Colonel?" asked Jack.

"No. I imagine they quarreled over the possession of the watch, and Shere Ali, perhaps forgetting the deadly nature of it, or knowing the time mechanism was set not to go off for some hours, grabbed it away from Singa. Then came a quarrel and the killing with the candlestick. However I don't want to speculate too far afield. We have certain matters settled at any rate."

"Yes, and I'll get back to the Homestead and watch King," observed Jack Young with a laugh.

"And I must get back to the shop," said Mr. Kettridge. "I have some work to do. Shall I leave the watch apart this way, Colonel?"

"Yes, I may need it to show to the jury. Leave it as it is, but put it under glass, and the needle away carefully. We may have to kill a rat in court as we did in Singa Phut's cell."

"I think we are coming on," mused Colonel Ashley, when his two visitors had gone. "I am entitled to a bit of recreation,'" and, opening his book, he read:

"Thus you having found and fitted for the place and depth thereof, then go home and pre-

pare your ground-bait, which is, next to the fruit of your labors, to be regarded."

"I wonder," mused the colonel, "if my ground bait is all prepared? Am I right or wrong? If I could see the diamond cross that Grafton says Larch sent back to his wife—if I knew where he got it—

The telephone rang.

"Yes, what is it?"

"A telegram for you, Colonel."

"Send it up!"

Tearing open the envelope Colonel Ashley read:

"Spotty Morgan has confessed everything and agrees to extradiction. Shall we send him on?"

"Send him on? I should say so!" cried the colonel to himself, as he made a grab for the telephone to dictate a message telling the police of Sango, the Western city, to hold Spotty Morgan until he could come for him. "And so Spotty has confessed? Well, that let's me out, even if he did save my life! But it was a close call!"

CHAPTER XX

IN THE SHADOWS

Colonel Ashley, after a night's sleep, was about to prepare for the trip, when he thought of Darcy in jail.

"I've got to send him word," he reasoned. "No, I'll let his sweetheart take it to him. It will be all the sweeter. Here, Shag!" he called.

"Yes, sah, Colonel! Whut is it?"

"Get me an auto, Shag—any kind of car will do. I want to take a run out to Pompey where Miss Mason lives. I won't trust the telephone, and I'll have time enough before I leave for the West. Get an auto."

"Yes, sah, Colonel!" and Shag hurried down to the hotel office.

It was while getting into the machine that a message was handed the colonel. Hastily he tore the note open. It was from James Darcy and read:

"Have just been informed they are going to put me on trial to-morrow for the murder of Mrs. Darcy. I don't know what this unexpected

move on the part of the prosecutor means, but I would like to see you.'"

"Whew!" whistled the colonel. "I never counted on *this*. Maybe the prosecution has something up their sleeve they're waiting to spring. They're trying to get ahead of me. Well, by gad, sir, they shan't! I'll beat 'em yet. This trip West will have to wait. Shag, you keep this auto here. I'm going into the hotel to telephone."

"Yes, sah, Colonel!"

Getting Kenneth on the wire, the detective ascertained that the message from Darcy was correct—the trial was to go on unexpectedly.

"I may be able to get a postponement," said the lawyer, "but it would not be safe to count on it. We had better prepare our defense. Are you all ready, Colonel?"

"Not quite. I've got to get a certain man back here from the West, but I can send for him. I'll not go myself, it's too risky. See what you can do about getting a postponement. It will be so much better if we can. I was going to tell Miss Mason to go and give some good news to Darcy, but maybe I'd better wait now."

"Can you produce the real murderer, Colonel Ashley?"

"I can, Mr. Kenneth. Don't let that worry you. When I want him I can lay my hands on

the real murderer! He can't get away! We'll have our little surprise, too!"

"Good! That will make Darcy feel better. I think I'll go to see him!"

"All right. And if you want to arrange for Miss Mason to visit him I think it would be a good thing. He may never go to trial, and then again he might, and, as you never can count on legal tangles, all the sentiment you can work up in his favor will be so much gained. You might let a discreet reporter know about Miss Mason's going to the jail."

"I will, Colonel, and thanks for the tip!"

But James Darcy did not go to trial the next day. Up to the last minute it looked as though he would, and he was even brought down from jail to the courtroom where a great crowd had assembled in anticipation of the opening of the now celebrated case.

But, when the judge took his place on the bench, and the criers had proclaimed silence, there was a whispered conference among the prosecutor and his detectives, in which Carroll and Thong took part. Then the judge was consulted and Darcy's lawyer was called to the bench. He was observed to be protesting against something, and finally the prosecutor went back to his seat at the table opposite the one where Darcy sat with his counsel.

"Have you any cases to move this morning, Mr.

Prosecutor?" asked the court in formal tones.

"May it please your Honor," began Mr. Bardon, "I had hoped to move the case of the State against James Darcy, indicted for murder, but, at the last minute, I find that one of my important witnesses is unable to be in attendance and, under those circumstances, I am compelled to ask for an adjournment of two weeks.

"I regret, as regards the counsel on the other side, having to do this, as he assures me he is ready and anxious to go to trial, but it is unavoidable, and I promise this, that if the witness referred to is not here two weeks from to-day, I will go on with the case anyhow."

"Have you anything to say, Mr. Kenneth?" asked the judge of Darcy's lawyer.

"Only that I regret the delay as much as does the prosecutor, and that we will be ready any time. I should prefer to go on with the trial now, but I realize that the matter is out my hands."

"The case then stands adjourned for two weeks," announced the court, and the officer, arising, announced:

"The case of the State against James Darcy postponed for two weeks, and all witnesses for the prosecution and for the defence will then appear without further notice."

There was a hum of disappointment, and most

of the crowd filed out when the prosecutor moved a case of assault and battery. Darcy, with a look at Amy Mason, which she returned with one of assurance and confidence, was taken back to jail.

Colonel Ashley read:

"Let your bait be as big a red worm as you can find."

"Spotty is certainly red," mused the fisherman. He was sitting, after the adjournment, in his hotel room. "Red and freckled. As for bait—"

Musingly he closed the little green book and watched the smoke curl lazily from his cigar.

Several days went by. The colonel was seated in his hotel room, his finger between the leaves of a little green book, smoking and reading. The telephone rang sharply.

"Hello. Oh, it's you, is it, Basset. So you got back with Spotty, did you? Good! No trouble on the trip? Fine! All right, I'll wait here for you. No, the trial went off for two weeks. You're in plenty of time. I'll expect you soon. Good-bye."

An hour later the man he had sent West to bring on Spotty Morgan entered his room. This man, a detective from the colonel's office, had been instructed by wire to go to a certain city and there, without the formality of requisition

papers, which Spotty more or less generously waived, bring on the prisoner.

"Well, what does he say, Basset?" asked the colonel, when he had provided his man with a cigar. "What does he say?" and the voice was eager.

"Oh, he says he did it all right. And there's the cross," and Basset tossed on the table beside the colonel a battered cross of gold in which sparkled many stones with the limpid fire of hidden rainbows.

"Did he give any particulars?"

"Oh, yes, he come across with the whole story."

"What made him hold back on me then? He might have known I'd find out. Why didn't he confess to me, Basset?"

"Well, I guess it's just as he says—he didn't want to split on a pal. But when his pal went back on him—"

"What do you mean—his pal went back on him?" asked the colonel, and there was uneasiness in his voice. "And, while you're about it, Basset, don't handle that cross so carelessly. It's worth several thousand dollars—a small fortune maybe—and some of the stones may be loose. They might fall out."

"That wouldn't hurt, Colonel. I reckon maybe I did lose one or two on the way back, careless like."

"You lost some of those diamonds?" The colonel's voice was sharp.

"Diamonds? Diamonds nothin'! Them's paste, Colonel. That's what made Spotty sore. His pal done him dirt, and that's why he split. The whole cross is made of phoney diamonds—paste!"

"Paste diamonds! Spotty's pal fooled him! What do you mean?" gasped the colonel, his apprehension growing. "Isn't this the diamond cross that Mrs. Larch owned? And yet, if this is here, how could her husband send it to her? And Spotty! Basset, what *does* it all mean?"

"Well, Colonel, I don't know whose cross this is, but whoever lost it didn't lose much. It's worth about ten dollars, I guess, and say, if ever there was a sore crook it's Spotty! He says when he and Blue Ike planned to rob Grafton's store they thought there was some real jewelry there."

"Rob Grafton's store!" cried the colonel. Didn't Spotty confess to stealing this diamond cross from Mrs. Darcy, and killing her because she wouldn't let him get away with it?"

"Colonel this is the first I've come on the case, and all I know is I was sent on to bring Spotty back. I wasn't told he was charged with murder."

"He wasn't exactly *charged* with it, but— Well, go on, what did he confess to?"

"Just robbery, that's all, and he didn't get much. He and Blue Ike cracked a crib here one night. From what Spotty says they got in Aaron Grafton's department store, opened the safe the way Ike always does, by listening to the tumblers in the lock, and took out some jewelry. There wasn't much—they picked the wrong safe I guess, but anyhow they took this cross. Had a fight over it, too, and it got stepped on, or banged up in some way, Spotty says. Then they heard a noise and skipped. Spotty kept the cross, and thought he'd have enough salted down, when he sold it, to live easy for a while.

"He and Ike met out West and tried to sell the diamond cross to a fence and got pinched as suspicious characters by the bulls who were making their regular round of the pawnshops. Ike squealed on Spotty for another job after they give him the third degree, and when Spotty heard of that it made him sore, as it would anybody. Then when the two bulls who pinched Spotty and Ike tested the diamonds in the cross and found they was phoney—as they might have guessed coming from a department store—Spotty was fit to be tied, he was so wild! So he up and confessed. Said he knew you wanted him for the job and was sorry he made so much trouble. To send word to you that he'd come on and stand trial."

"But, stars and stripes! I didn't want him for this little robbery job!" cried the colonel. "I didn't even know he did it! I was after him for the murder of Mrs. Darcy, where I thought he got the diamond cross. And to think the jewels are paste!" and the colonel looked at them sparkling in the electric light as bravely as though they were worth a fortune instead of being what a poor shop girl might wear to a bricklayer's ball.

"Well, that's all I know about it," said Basset. "Spotty wanted me to tell you he'd confessed, and he's dead sore on Blue Ike."

For several seconds the colonel said nothing, and then he shook his head as a dog might on emerging from deep water, and remarked:

"Well, I've got to take another tack, I guess. Tell Spotty I'll arrange to have him bailed. It'll be easy on a mere theft charge. But how in thunder am I going to get Darcy off if I haven't any one to offer—"

The tinkle of the telephone bell interrupted the colonel's half-aloud musing.

"Hello," he said into the transmitter. "Oh, that you, Jack? Well, what's up now?"

For a moment the colonel listened intently, many emotions flashing across his face. Basset toyed idly with the jeweled cross, which sparkled as bravely as the real stones might have done.

"Yes— yes," said the colonel impatiently. "Go on, Jack!"

And in a few more seconds the colonel added:

"All right! I'll get right after him! Out toward Pompey you say? All right, I'll shadow him! By the way, Basset is here. He brought on Spotty Morgan. Come on over to my room and have a talk with him. He'll tell you the yarn—It'll surprise you—I haven't time. I'm going to get right out!" and the receiver went on the hook with a bang.

"Anything I can do, Colonel?" asked Basset. "I'm sorry to have to disappoint you about this cross, but—"

"Oh, that was my own fault, for taking too much for granted. I should have asked Grafton more questions, and gotten a description of Mrs. Larch's ornament. He never said anything to me about being robbed."

"Maybe he didn't count this, it not being worth much," and Basset flipped the sparkling cross half way across the table.

"Maybe not, and yet—"

But if the colonel had any thoughts regarding Aaron Grafton he kept them to himself as he made ready to go out.

"Know when you'll be back?" asked Basset.

"No, I can't say. Make yourself at home here. I'll tell 'em at the desk. Shag will be over presently. One of you stay here so I can telephone in if I have to. You'd better plan to stay all night if I don't get back."

"Want to say where you're going?"

"I suppose I'd better. I'm going to Pompey."

"Out where you said Mrs. Larch is staying?"

"Yes, only she doesn't call herself that now."

"I understand."

"She's taken her maiden name again since the separation. Yes, I'm going to Pompey, and it may be night when I get there. I'll have to do my shadowing among the shadows I guess, as I've often cast for trout. But, dark or light, I think I'll bring home the right fish this time."

And so, as the early shadows of the late afternoon were slanting over Colchester the old detective boarded a train, keeping in view a well-dressed, freshly-shaven individual, who, for all his slickness and sleekness, seemed to have about him the air of a tiger. His hands, in new gloves, slowly clasped and unclasped, as though he would have liked to twine the fingers about the soft throat of a victim.

"Yes," murmured the colonel, as he sank into his seat, "I think I'll bring home the big fish this time."

CHAPTER XXI

SWIRLING WATERS

At the little station of Pompey the colonel saw his man leave the train. For the wily fisherman to slip from the car on the other side of the track and get behind a tool shanty, was the work of but a moment, and as the train pulled out, and puffed on its way, the detective, peering around the corner of the shed, which housed a handcar and other tools of the section hands, had a glimpse of his "fish," as he facetiously termed him, standing rather irresolutely on the station platform.

"Now for the next move," murmured the colonel.

It was not long in being played.

The man went inside the station, but the detective did not come from his post of observation. The depot was so small that any one leaving it, even on the side away from the tracks, would be seen as soon as he had passed beyond the shadows. But the man evidently had no intention of going away. He came out again on the front platform, accompanied by a boy—one, seemingly,

who ran errands and delivered telegrams when any came to disturb the peaceful solitude of Pompey.

"I must see that note!" murmured Colonel Ashley, as he saw one handed to the boy. "If he goes in the direction I think he will, I'll get it too! I think I know the lady to whom it is addressed."

The boy talked with the man a little, nodded his head as if understanding, and then started off up the tracks, toward a path that led across a field and toward a cluster of village houses.

"Just as I thought," the colonel whispered to himself.

Keeping the tool-house between himself and the man now nervously pacing the platform, the colonel walked rapidly away from the station, in the direction taken by the boy.

The boy's legs were short and vigorous, the colonel's long and no less muscular, and, thanks to his devotion to Walton, which had taken him tramping many miles over hilly trails, as well as across level meadows, the old detective was soon able to overtake the lad, and at a point impossible of observation from the station.

"I say!" called the colonel.

The boy stopped, and looked back questioningly.

"Did you tell him where the best fishing was?" asked the colonel.

"Fishing? Who?"

"The gentleman who gave you that note. Is it possible he didn't mention fishing?"

"Naw! He didn't say nothin' about it. He just give me this letter, and—"

"Very likely he forgot about the fishing part," and the detective smiled grimly. "Let me see it just a moment."

Without hesitation the boy handed it over. Thought was hardly more rapid than the colonel's perusal of the missive, and, as he gave it back to the boy, he remarked:

"It's all right. I didn't make any mistake. Now hurry, and you needn't come back to the station right away."

"But he told me to bring him an answer."

"Oh, did he? Well, then I'll wait for you in the village and you can let me see it first. Then I'll know all about the fishing and I can be on hand with my friend. Trot along, Sonny. I'll meet you in the village when you get the answer to the note. Then I'll know just where to go fishing. How is it around here? Are there any good streams?"

"Are there? Say, I've caught some of the biggest chubb—"

"Ah, I thought I wasn't mistaken in thinking you a pupil in the school of Izaak Walton."

"Isaac Walton? Huh! That ain't *our* teacher's name!"

the station, "that I'll make a little change in the old saying, and *follow* the woman instead of *looking* for her, since I know where she is already."

Back then to the peaceful little village went the fisherman, and, reaching the house where the boy had left the note, taking therefrom its answer, Colonel Ashley waited with all the patience that might characterize a waiting beside some fishing stream.

But his patience was not tried long, for presently a veiled woman emerged from the house. She walked away rapidly the detective following unseen.

"She is going to meet him, just as she promised in the note, though it must be galling to her pride," murmured the old detective. "I wonder if she really believes he'll keep his word—or can keep it? Well, I'll be there at the finish, and I think this *will* be the finish," he went on grimly, as he thrust his hand into his side pocket, where the "hooks" jingled with grim music.

As the woman walked on, she turned now and then and looked back along the fast-darkening streets.

For a moment the colonel was suspicious.

"I wonder if she has seen me?" he murmured.

He gave a quick, backward glance, and started as he saw another figure not far behind him.

"Can it be?" exclaimed the colonel. "No, it's Aaron Grafton," he proceeded with an air of relief. "He must have been at her house, and she has asked him to follow her, to make sure no harm is done. A bit foolish of him, under the circumstances. But when a man's in love—"

The colonel shrugged his shoulders and chuckled grimly.

"However, I must take care that he does not see me."

Slipping behind a tree, the colonel effected a change in hats, for he always wore a soft one and carried several collapsible ones. Then, buttoning his coat rather askew about him, to give a careless air to his attire (the colonel, normally was one of the neatest men living) he crossed to the other side of the street and then became the shadower of two instead of one, for Aaron Grafton had passed on without, apparently, noticing him.

The woman was still in sight, and before she reached the station the man who had sent the note came out and met her on the driveway. The colonel looked back and saw Mr. Grafton dodging behind a tree.

"He doesn't want to be seen, either," he mused.

Relying on his simple but effective disguise, the colonel made bold to walk within hearing dis-

tance of the man and woman, the latter having come to a stiff halt when she saw the man advancing to meet her.

"We can't talk here," said the dispatcher of the note. "Will you walk a little way with me?"

His tones had the cutting coldness of steel, and there was a sort of restrained cruelty in his every action.

"I suppose it would not be wise to be seen talking to you here," was the woman's low reply. "And, believe me, I have no desire to be seen with you again, ever. It was only your promise in the note that brought me here. Are you prepared to keep it if I walk a way with you?"

"I am! This is no more pleasant for me than for you, but it must be done. Come!"

He did not offer to touch her, nor did he turn his head more than half way in speaking to her. He seemed to be controlling himself by an effort, and she seemed to shrink away. Again she looked back, down the fast-darkening street, as though to make sure there was a way of escape—some one near on whom she could rely.

"Don't worry. I'll be there when you have your little talk," whispered the colonel to himself.

"Suppose we walk up on The Heights," suggested the man. "We will not be disturbed, and—"

"Up there?" she gasped.

"Why not?" he asked, as they walked on, and

the colonel, affecting a slowness in gait, heard the words. "Just because you used to walk there in your—in other days," he substituted quickly, "is no reason why you shouldn't now, is it?"

"Only—*memories!*" Her voice was very low.

"Memories? Bah!" The words were as though he spewed them from his mouth like a bitter taste. "Come on!" and his tones were rough.

The woman looked at him a moment with eyes that seemed to burn through her veil, and then followed. The colonel passed on ahead, slouched across the street once more, and lagged behind, so that he might follow.

The couple turned toward the outskirts of the village, where, on a hill, known locally as "The Heights" there was a grove of trees. Below the hill, at one place cutting deep into it and making a precipitious cliff, was a little river. At the point where the stream had bitten into the hill it had washed for itself a defile, the bottom rock-covered, so that the waters swirled over it in foam.

The Heights was the favorite trysting place of lovers, and many were the pleasant spots there. With evening coming on, it was almost sure to be deserted, though later, if there was a moon, murmuring voices would mingle with the eclipse of the swirling waters in the gully below.

"Yes, it's a quiet place for a talk," mused the colonel.

The man and woman passed on. Behind them came the shadower, and behind him Aaron Grafton.

Up The Heights walked the leading pair, seemingly unaware of the presence of any one but themselves. Into the shadows they strolled, still stiff and uncompromising, both of them. At last the woman, halting near the edge of the cliff, beyond which the woods were thicker, faced the man.

"This is far enough," she said, and she turned so that the fast-fading light of the west was on her veiled face. She did not raise the mesh.

"Yes, this is far enough, I suppose," said the man, and there was a sneer in his tones. "Too far, perhaps. But—"

"I did not come here to discuss anything with you but the matter you spoke of in your note," cut in the woman. "Did you bring my diamonds as you promised?"

"Yes, I have them."

His voice was as cold as hers.

"Then give them to me and let me go. I don't know why I consented to meet you, except that you said you would give them only to me, personally. And I don't, even for that, know why I came here. I—"

"Possibly in memory of other days?" the man sneered.

"Never!" she answered bitterly. "Oh, never that!"

"Well, as you choose," he went on, with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "But I have a few things I want to say to you, and I didn't want the whole village babbling about it. Too many know me here, so I kept out of sight as much as I could."

"Say what you have to say, and quickly. Give me my diamonds, to which I have a right, and let me go. That is all I ask of you."

"I'm afraid it can't be done so quickly as all that," and the man laughed cuttingly. "In the first place, I want you to sign a paper. I have it with me, also a fountain pen. I've a flashlight to let you read what you sign, in case it gets too dark."

"Do you mean a receipt for the diamonds?"

"Not exactly, Cynthia, I—"

"Miss Ratchford, if you please!" she exclaimed. "Miss Ratchford to you, always, after this!"

"Oh, very well! Now look here! I'm done with soft words and foolishness!"

He took a sudden step nearer her, and she shrank back. Colonel Ashley, who had worked himself to a position, where, hidden behind a

screen of bushes, he could see and hear, watched closely.

"Foolishness?" the woman questioned.

"Yes, foolishness! You know the trouble I'm in. I've got to have money! You can get it for me!"

"I?"

"Yes. And, by the eternal, you've got to! Do you think I'm going to ruin just because you couldn't stand a little rough treatment now and then? Why, better women than you would be glad to come back to me. I'll take you back!"

"Take me back! Oh, my God!"

"Cut out that hysterical stuff!" he ordered. "I'm desperate! I've got to have money. I can raise it on a note if you'll sign it and put up those bonds for security, and by—"

He caught her wrist in a grip that made her wince with pain as he swung her around to face him.

"I've got to have your signature and the bonds!" he exclaimed in voice tense with suppressed passion.

"The bonds!" she exclaimed. "You know what almost became of them. I let you raise money on them once, and almost lost them. Now you dare ask me for them again?"

"I do, and I'm going to enforce my demands! I've got to have money. I darn't sell your dia-

monds—at least I don't want to. I'd rather you'd have them," and he seemed to weaken as if with romance when it came to this sentiment. "As for the bonds—"

"You'll never touch them!" she cried, bitterly. "Isn't it enough that you have ruined my life? Now you must—"

"Oh, stop the theatrical business!" he sneered. "Pity you didn't go on the stage. Now look here. This is your last chance. I'll give you your diamonds if you'll sign this paper so I can get out of the tangle I'm in. You've got to sign! It's your last chance. If you don't, by all the—"

She tore herself away from him, and turned to flee, but he was too quick for her, and was about to encircle her in his arms when she shrank back and gave a despairing cry.

"Don't—don't touch me!"

This seemed to madden the man, for he sprang toward her, fury and threat in every gesture.

"Aaron! Aaron! He's going to kill me!" screamed Cynthia.

Thought was not quicker than the leaping forward of Colonel Ashley. Out from the shadows he sprang, to whirl back the man who, with blazing eyes and murderous hate written on his face, confronted Cynthia Ratchford.

"What—what's this?" snarled the man, strug-

gling to retain his balance. "What's this? Who the devil are you, to come between me and my—"

"Don't dare profane that name!" warned the woman. "I—I— Oh, Aaron! where are you?"

It was very dark now, under the trees.

"Ha! So *that's* who he is! Your old lover, Grafton! Well, I'll soon finish him! I'll make him wish he hadn't come between us with his protecting ways, and his diamond cross that he goes so secretly to have mended. Bah! A pretty lover! Take that, you sneaking fool!"

There was a sliver of flame in the darkness, and mingled with the report came a cry of anguish and a woman's scream, as a heavy stick in the hands of Colonel Ashley broke the hand that held the revolver.

A little thud among the bushes told where the weapon had fallen, its bullet cutting the tree branches overhead.

"Oh—who—who are *you?* gasped the woman, as the colonel stepped between her and the man he had maimed. "I thought Mr. Grafton was—"

"I think that is he coming now," said the old detective quietly, as the sound of some one running up the path was borne to their strained senses.

"Look here!" snarled the man with the broken wrist, as he clasped it with his other hand,

"aren't you—" he started back as a last flicker of the waning light fell across the colonel's face. "Who in the name of all the devils in hades are you?" he cried. "What right have you—"

"The right of the law," was the quiet answer. The colonel's hand slipped into his pocket, where something metallic clicked. "The right of the law. Langford Larch, I arrest you for the murder of Mrs. Amelia Darcy!"

It was so still for a moment that the rustle of a bird's wings in the tree overhead sounded like the rushing of wind. Colonel Ashley, drawing something from his pocket, took a step nearer the maimed man. As he did so Larch laughed wildly.

"Ah, so that's the game, is it?" he cried. "You have betrayed me, Cynthia, you she-devil! You put up this little game with your lover Grafton, did you? Well you—"

"Langford, I never—!"

"Bah! Well, I'll fool you all! Arrest me for murdering the old woman, will you? Like hell you will!"

He stepped back a pace, Colonel Ashley following.

"Keep back!" cried Larch. "If you touch me —! I'm not afraid of you. Yes, I did kill her! I didn't mean to, but I did. The game's up! I can see that. But you'll never get me to

the chair. I'll fool you all! I'm not afraid to die!"

Before the colonel or Aaron Grafton, who just then burst through the bushes fringing the path, could make a move to prevent him, Langford Larch, with a cry like that of a stricken beast, threw himself over the edge of the rocky precipice, and his body went crashing down a hundred feet into the swirling waters below.

CHAPTER XXII

HIS LAST CASE

SLOWLY the bruised and cut lips moved. Faintly came from the maimed throat a hoarse whisper.

"I—did—it! I know this is the end. I'll confess everything!"

Before his death, which followed soon after he had been taken from the swirling waters, Langford Larch made a complete confession, telling how he had killed Mrs. Darcy.

Swiftly went the news to the jail, and later to the courthouse, whence, after a conference between the grave judge and a somewhat disappointed, though perhaps gladly so, prosecutor of the pleas, James Darcy walked forth a free man, honorably discharged from the custody of the court, the indictment against him for murder quashed.

Amy Mason was the first to greet her lover when he stepped away from the bench of the judge, before which he stood to hear himself cleared of the charge.

"Oh, Jimmie boy! I'm so glad!" and her eyes beamed.

"And so am I, Amy If you knew what I have gone through—"

"As if I didn't know, Jimmie boy! The colonel told me some of it."

"Did he? Isn't he a trump? Where is he now?"

"Oh, dad carried him off for some long-delayed fishing," answered Amy, as she and James Darcy left the courtroom before a throng, that could not be restrained from cheering, despite the cries of "Silence!" on the part of the constable.

"But how did he know that Larch killed her?" asked Darcy, as he and Amy rode away in her car, amid the cheers of the throng outside the county building.

"By the process of elimination, so he told dad. He never for an instant really believed you guilty, Jimmie boy, even after the discovery of the electric wires, though he let those two detectives think he did."

"And what about Singa Phut and Harry King?"

"Oh, they were only incidents, so Colonel Ashley says," went on the happy girl, as the automobile rolled along. "Even that funny Spotty was 'eliminated', as our dear old fisherman calls it, when he explained about the diamond cross. And as for Mr. Grafton, though he was mixed up in the jewel part of the mystery, he was only acting

to help Miss Ratchford, as she wants to be called. Poor girl, she's had a hard time, too! I hope she finds as much happiness as—"

"As who?" asked Darcy, as Amy hesitated.

"As I have," came the gentle answer, as Amy gazed with shining eyes at the man beside her.

Langford Larch told everything in the brief time left him between his fatal leap and the passing of his soul to a higher judgment than that of the county courts. Some time before the events leading to the separation, a meeting between his wife and Grafton had been witnessed by one of Larch's hotel employees, who told of it, magnifying its importance. Larch's jealous disposition was inflamed, and there was a stormy scene between him and his wife. He knocked her down, and that was the end, as far as she was concerned. She told him she would leave him. She admitted that she still cared for Grafton, but denied any intimacy with him. Then came the legal separation.

Before this, however, Larch had missed his wife's diamond cross, and charged her with having disposed of it. During their final interview she told the truth, of how it had been stepped on, and that Grafton had taken it to be repaired. It was then that Larch saw his opportunity for getting possession of the valuable stones, for his debts were pressing, and, though it was sus-

pected by few, he needed a large sum in cash.

One night, partly intoxicated, which was unusual for him, and perhaps on this occasion done in desperation, Larch called at the jewelry store. Mrs. Darcy happened to come downstairs as he arrived, and, knowing him well, admitted him, though the store had long been closed. In one hand she held the Indian watch, perhaps picked up idly from the repair table. In the other hand was the diamond cross.

This ornament Larch instantly demanded, but Mrs. Darcy refused to give it up, not only on account of his condition, but because she did not consider that he had any claim to it, knowing that it had been his wife's before their marriage.

Larch was insistent in his demands, and tried to take the diamond cross from Mrs. Darcy. She resisted him in the dimly-lighted and deserted store, and he caught up the paper-cutter dagger and threatened her.

She backed away from him, toward the open safe, intending, it would seem, to put the valuable ornament in there and lock it up, when Larch struck at her. As he did so, he knocked down the heavy statue of the hunter. It struck her on the head, inflicting what would have proved a mortal blow, even without the knife thrust.

As the statue fell Larch leaned forward to

grasp it, he said, but he slipped and the knife in his hand entered her side, and she fell on it, driving it deeper in. Larch declared he never meant to kill, or even seriously hurt, Mrs. Darcy. But he did kill her.

Seeing her lying, as he then thought, only perhaps seriously wounded, Larch, taking the diamond cross, staggered around the jewelry shop, and then fled panic-stricken, went to the Homestead, and drank himself into a stupor.

Incidentally Larch's confession cleared up other matters, and shifted certain responsibilities from various persons. The Indian watch, though impregnated with poison, had nothing to do with the death of Mrs. Darcy, though she might have been slightly scratched by the hidden needle. And the money Harry King went out and got the night of the murder was given him, as he boasted at the time, by a woman. He refused to name her, but she was named later, when King's wife filed a petition for a divorce—not her first by the way.

"Well, Colonel," remarked Mr. Mason, as together they strolled toward a trout stream, several days after the clearing up of the diamond cross mystery, "I'm glad to know you had the same faith in young Darcy that I had."

"Oh, yes, there couldn't be any other way out. Jimmie boy, as your Amy calls him—

bless her heart—was a bit careless, but that was all. Some of his wires that he rigged up for his electric lathe, secretly, did get tangled with the heavily-charged conductors of the lighting system, though he didn't know that. It may be they were responsible for the shocks given. I didn't go into that deeply. And Darcy didn't repair Singa Phut's watch when he said he would. It was in getting up early to do this and have the timepiece ready when promised, that he discovered his relative's dead body."

"Where did Harry King get that odd coin which made it look bad in his case for a while?" asked Mr. Mason.

"Larch gave it to him, unsuspectingly enough, it seems. When Larch went into Mrs. Darcy's store she had the tray of rare coins out of the safe. She may have been going to put them away with the Indian watch and the diamond cross, but she had no chance. And after Larch had killed her, seeing the money, he picked up a handful, as he needed some change. In a way the discovery of the odd coin helped in solving the mystery, for I kept my helper, Jack Young, at the Homestead after that, and it was hearing King and Larch talking about the diamond cross that gave me just the clew I wanted.

"Larch had taken out the valuable diamonds from the ornament, and had disposed of them,

in spite of what he said to his wife just before his death, to get some much-needed money. He really did send her the crushed gold setting, promising, in the letter he dispatched to her by the boy I intercepted, to restore the diamonds to her if she would meet him.

"This she consented to do. As it happened, Aaron Grafton was calling on her at the time, trying to find some means of helping her, for there is the old-time love between them. And it was at her suggestion that he followed her when I was shadowing Larch. Evidently Grafton didn't, at that time, know it was only the crushed and diamondless cross that Larch had sent back. And after he died and confessed, we found a paper of imitation diamonds in his pocket that Larch had ready to use in deceiving his wife if she had agreed to sign the papers he wanted her to, so he could bolster up his failing business."

"Well, he's out of the way now, and I hear the hotel has been sold."

"Yes, Mr. Mason. And it will be, so I hear, once more the oldtime and respectable resort it once was. As for Miss Ratchford, she has gone to friends in California, and there, I understand, Mr. Grafton will shortly follow. They are to be married in about a year. Mr. Grafton is going to sell out his business. He told me he

would not press the charge against Spotty for stealing the imitation diamond cross. So Spotty will soon be at liberty again."

"I'm glad of that. He's a sport—in his own way."

"Yes," agreed the colonel.

"One point puzzles me," went on Mr. Mason, "and that is, why Cynthia—I call her that for I've known her for years—why she didn't make Larch support her after the separation. She could have had a regular divorce and big alimony—that is if he could have paid."

"Maybe that's it—he couldn't. Anyhow, she seems not to have wanted to accept any of his money after he had spoiled her life. It was a foolish marriage, though at the time it may have seemed advantageous to her—or her mother. After the murder, or let us call it killing, for Larch with his last breath protested he never meant it—after that, which Cynthia seems to have guessed—she was even more strong in her determination not to take any of his money. She was prepared, too, in case Jimmie had been found guilty, to make a statement implicating her husband, though, under the law she could not be compelled to testify against him in a murder trial."

"Well, I'm glad it's all over, Colonel," said Mr. Mason, with a sigh of relief. "There are two happy ones, if ever there were any," and

he motioned to Amy and Darcy, walking slowly across the meadow in the golden glow of the setting sun.

"Yes, I'm glad I had a hand in helping them."

The young people, turning, saw the two men, and Amy waved her hand. Slowly she and her lover approached.

"What luck, Colonel?" she asked gaily.

"The very best! You didn't exaggerate when you spoke of your trout stream."

"I'm glad you like it. Jimmie and I were just talking about you."

"I wondered why my ears burned," and the old detective laughed.

"Colonel Ashley," put in Darcy, "there's just one thing I can't seem to clear up in all this business."

"What's that?"

"Well, what made all the clocks stop at different times? I thought I knew something of the jewelry business, but this puzzles me."

"Just because it's so simple," laughed the detective. "Larch stopped those of the clocks that didn't run down and stop themselves. He figured out, crazily enough in his fear and drunken frenzy, that if no clocks or watches were going no one would know exactly what time the killing took place. So, after Mrs. Darcy was dead, he hurried about the store, with no one in the wet and

deserted street to watch him, and, stopping the timepieces, moved the hands of many of them to suit his fancy. But he forgot the ticking watch."

"It was simple," murmured Darcy. "No wonder I didn't think of it. Have you so simple a theory regarding the queer state I was in that night—I mean awakening and going to sleep again after feeling something brush my face?"

"Not unless Larch tried to chloroform you after he had killed Mrs. Darcy, and was afraid you might come down and discover what had happened," answered the detective. "That will remain a mystery, but its solution is not important."

"Not as long as you have cleared Jimmie boy!" laughed Amy, and yet there was a look of sadness on her face, for it had been an ordeal for all of them.

"Oh, well, he'd have been cleared anyhow, if the worst had come to the worst," said the colonel. "However, now that it's all over, I can give proper attention to my fishing."

"And I," murmured James Darcy, "can—"

But a soft hand over his lips prevented further utterance.

Lightly as a feather the colonel flicked a fly over the quiet pool where the waters swirled in a lazy eddy. There was a splash in the sun, a shrill song of the reel, and a fish leaped high in

the air, trying to shake the barb from its mouth.

"No, you don't!" laughed the old detective. "I've hooked you this time!"

"As you hooked Langford Larch," murmured Jack Young, who sat on the bank in the shade, while the colonel fished and Shag was setting out lunch under the trees.

"This *is* my last case!" exclaimed the detective as he slipped his prize into the grass-lined creel. "Positively my *last!* I never would have gone on with this, even after I started, except for the pleading of Miss Mason. But I'm through! No more detective cases for me! I've retired!"

Jack looked at the trim and upright figure and keen, handsome face, neither of which showed the old colonel's age. Then the younger detective glanced at Shag, winked an eye, and murmured:

"Through until the next time; eh Shag?"

"Yo' done said it!" exclaimed the colored man with a grin. "Now, sah, Colonel, lunch am served!"

THE END

Quadrille Court.....*Cecil Adair*

The Great Hold-Up Mystery
Wilfred Usher

Uncanny House....*Mary L. Pendered*

Long Shadows.....*Camilla Hope*

Sem's Moroccan Love.....*Arthur Kay*

Tales of the Fish Patrol...*Jack London*

The Gold Hunters.....*J. D. Borthwick*

The Lovely Malincourt.*Helen Mathers*

The Justice of the King
Hamilton Drummond

The Secret of Sheen....*John Laurence*

In the Old West.....*G. F. Ruxton*

Don Coyote.....*Whitman Chambers*

The Phantom Rickshaw and Other
Mysteries.....*Rudyard Kipling*

When God Laughs.....*Jack London*

Dreamy Hollow....*Sumner C. Britton*

By Foul Means.....*Patrick Leyton*

On the Highest Hill..*H. M. Stephenson*

The Star of Hollywood..*Ed. Stilgebauer*

ON THE HIGHEST HILL

By H. M. STEPHENSON

Exceptionally interesting and well written

Harry Waters, a young Cambridge undergraduate, becomes entangled with a girl, murders his blackmailer, is found guilty of murder, escapes from Gaol, and gets safely away to America. He joins the Great War and is finally reprieved. The book is of absorbing interest.

BY FOUL MEANS

By PATRICK LEYTON

A smuggling mystery

Hermione Arden buys her dead husband's home on the Coast of Scotland. She hears rumors of smuggling, sees strange lights, and receives a scrap of paper on which is written the date of her husband's death. A delightful young French smuggler comes on the scene and furnishes a great deal of amusement, and the solution of the mystery.

DREAMY HOLLOW

By SUMNER C. BRITTON

Spirits and spooks!!!

Drury Villard, after amassing a most prodigious fortune suddenly retired and went to live in Dreamy Hollow, the home he built for the girl he was to marry with hopes that the spirit of her dead body would be hovering around it.

THE PHANTOM RICKSHAW and other Mysteries

By RUDYARD KIPLING

Kipling's most famous ghost stories

The Phantom Rickshaw; My Own True Ghost Story; The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes; The Man Who Would be King; "The Finest [illegible]y in the World"—all of these between two covers. As Kipling says, "This is not exa[illegible]ly a book of downright ghost-stories, as the cover makes believe. It is rather a collection of facts that never quite explained themselves."

WHEN GOD LAUGHS

By JACK LONDON

"America's most important writer."—Georg Brandes

Gifted with a wonderful imagination and a vivid style, Jack London has provided entertainment for thousands upon thousands of readers. This is a collection of short stories.

TALES OF THE FISH PATROL

By JACK LONDON

Spirited Adventures

This narrates the adventures that befell Jack London during the year when he was a member of the Fish Patrol in San Francisco Bay. The conquering of the law breaking elements of that great region are breath-taking.

IN THE OLD WEST

By GEORGE FREDERICK RUXTON

Indian fights, and fur hunting

This story is the only complete picture of the Old West in the days of the real pioneers who blazed the trail across the Rockies to the Pacific in the days before the Mexican War.

THE JUSTICE OF THE KING

By HAMILTON DRUMMOND

A 20th Century historical novel

Stephen La Mothe, a brave romantic boy of 24, is the central interest of this story. He makes things move. King Louis XI sends Stephen to sift out a plot and the trouble begins when Stephen falls in love with a beautiful girl.

THE GOLD HUNTERS

By J. D. BORTHWICK

The Days of Gold

A first-hand picture of life in California Mining Camps in the early fifties. Stories of arduous travel, working claims, Frisco, Sacramento, Sonora and "the diggings."